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MONTESSORI SCHOOLS

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BY

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PROLOGUE

THIS book is the outcome of two months' observational work carried on in Italy and the Canton of Ticino in April, May, and June 1913. Like many other people I had been greatly stirred in the summer of 1912 by reading the English translation of Dr. Montessori's book which in the Italian edition bore the title, 'The Method of Scientific Pedagogy applied to Infant Instruction in the Case dei Bambini,' a title more suited to the contents than was that of the 'Montessori Method' adopted by the American translator.

In the autumn of 1912 and the early spring of 1913 I attended a good many lectures on Dr. Montessori's work given in London, and I had become a member of the Montessori Society soon after it was started in the summer of 1912. I was thus well acquainted with the leading principles and with the material, but whereas there were some things which I had heard over and over again, there were many things which I wanted to hear but had not heard. I had not gathered enough detail to be able to form a mental picture of what the work in Italy really amounted to. It was for the purpose of seeing how things

actually worked out in practice that I determined to go to Italy at the beginning of April 1913. By this time the training course which Dr. Montessori was holding, and which was attended by eighty-three students who came mainly from America and Great Britain, was half over. I discussed with the secretary of the Montessori Society the advisability of trying to join this course and going direct to Rome, but we came to the conclusion that I should gain most by studying first the schools in Milan and then going on to Rome later, when the training course was over, and it would be easier to gain access to the schools there and to see them under more natural conditions.

Accordingly, I put myself in communication with the directrice at Milan, whose address was given me by the secretary of the English Montessori Society, and received from her an invitation to spend as much time as I liked in her Casa dei Bambini. This, consequently, was where my observational work began.

Having had a scientific training and been a science teacher for a considerable number of years, I was fully aware of the qualifications necessary for sound observational work. For an observer of schools these qualifications, I think, may be stated as follows: acquaintance with other methods employed for children of the same age so that novel points may not escape notice; the psychological knowledge necessary for appreciating the results of the method; impartiality

of judgment in estimating the value of the results; patience in studying the phenomena so that the impression formed one day may, if necessary, be corrected by later impressions; carefulness in weighing the judgments arrived at and in expressing them verbally.

But it is one thing to gain and possess for oneself a mental picture and another to be able to convey it to others. For this one needs literary skill and the power of transmitting an emotional tone which shall vivify the mental pictures of one's readers. This power, it seems to me, Dr. Montessori possesses, and it is undoubtedly this which accounts for the fascination of her book. To this power I lay no claim, and rightly so, as the reader will soon discover for himself. One merit alone I claim—that I spared no pains in my attempt to see truly, and in writing out my observations have taken equal pains to convey, as far as possible, this truth unfalsified.

CHAPTER I

THE CASA DEI BAMBINI IN THE VIA SOLARI, MILAN

The Casa dei Bambini in the Via Solari in Milan is the older of the two Case dei Bambini which belong to the Humanitarian Society of that city, a society with a socialistic bias which engages in various activities all directed towards the elevation of the people. One of these activities is the provision of workmen's flats, and the two Case dei Bambini are situated, as are also the Case dei Bambini in which Dr. Montessori's work with normal children began in Rome, in buildings occupied by workmen. The older of these in the Via Solari is on the outskirts of the town in one direction, beyond the cattle market and shambles and near big engineering works, while the newer one in the Viale Lombardia is at the diametrically opposite corner of the city, in a part which is destined to expand as the projected new university buildings for Milan are to be erected there. In both, the workmen's flats are built round wide open courtyards in which are grass and plants, small trees and palms. A porter's lodge in both cases guards the entrance to the courtyard, which is open only

to the inhabitants of the flats and those who have business with them.

In the Via Solari there is a middle block of flats with a courtyard back and front, and it is in this that rooms on the ground floor are given up to the Casa dei Bambini. This contains two good-sized working-rooms, both of which open out by a short flight of steps into the garden. Between these is a small room with washhand basins. Beyond is the room of the directrice, in which she keeps the weighing and measuring machines, her medicine chest, and the biographical charts which she and the visiting doctor fill in for each child. Next to this there is a bathroom, with a bath supplied with hot and cold water, and the offices, which are thus divided from the working-rooms by a passage and do not lead off from one of them as in the Viale Lombardia.

The garden is a piece of the courtyard which has been railed in. All that goes on there is open to the observation of people in the courtyard and at the many windows overlooking the garden. A flower bed runs within the railing, and this is divided up into little oblong plots which belong to the different children. There are also several round beds, one of which has been converted into a fountain. This is much appreciated by the children. Against the wall is a fowl-pen in which are fowls which the children feed, and on the wall is a pigeon-house from which

pigeons come fluttering down into the garden. The ground between the beds is covered with the loose grey pebbles which serve as gravel.

The steps which lead down from the windows to the garden are flanked by sloping walls. It does not take the visitor to the Casa long to discover what an inexhaustible source of exercise these sloping walls are to the children. Again and again they slide down them without any of that danger risked by adventurous children when they slide down the banisters. It did not seem to me that their clothes suffered appreciably. Had the architect of the flats in the Viale Lombardia ever watched the children in the Via Solari at play, he would have provided a similar amusement for them. Instead of this he made the walls of the steps leading down to the open space impossible for sliding down, and the children there are driven to provide themselves with a very unsatisfactory substitute by propping one end of a bench on the upright fixed for the see-saw. I wonder how many school architects have ever studied the school house from the children's point of view.

The working-rooms are simply furnished. On the walls are a few pictures, one a photograph of the Madonna della Sedia, which Montessorians have adopted as their picture. This copy was given to the school by three American visitors, who in whole-hearted American enthusiasm expressed on the back of

it their admiration of 'the best school in the world'. In the one room is a piano, seldom used now, unfortunately, as the present directrice cannot play. In the other are the cabinets which contain the Montessorian material and the children's drawings and writing-books, and which the children themselves keep in a state of neatness and order. The tables for the children, though not made for one child only as in some of the Case, are light and can be carried by two children. All the time I was there they were placed two or more together, so that a group of children could gather round one table as they would in an ordinary nursery. In Milan there was no attempt to place the tables facing one way in what might be called a school arrangement, though this was done in Rome. The chairs were light, as are the chairs used in many English kindergartens. But practice in carrying them had given even the smallest children an agility and ease in doing this such as I have not seen in English schools.

The number of children in attendance this spring was thirty-five. This was less than it had been previously; the staff, however, numbered the same. There was first the directrice, who had been assistant to the former directrice, now directrice in the Viale ardia Casa, and had like her been trained under a Bontempi, the inspector of infants' schools iss canton of Ticino. Both of these teachers

had been examined by Dr. Montessori and had seen something of her at Bellinzona. They frequently met one another to discuss their work, and aimed as far as possible at realizing the ideal which Dr. Montessori had set before them in her book. They kept in touch with Signorina Bontempi, whom they saw when they returned to Bellinzona for their holidays. It was a matter of disappointment to them this summer that the expected visit to Milan of Dr. Montessori with some of her students did not take place.

The second member of the staff was an assistant who had received a sort of training in Milan. She helped to some extent with the teaching, and interested herself particularly in the work of the children in the garden. She had a real love of children, and seemed to have grasped the fundamental ideas on which the working of the Casa was based.

The same may be said of the pleasant married woman who was responsible for the cleaning, and whose little girl came into the Casa when her work at the municipal school was over for the day. This woman took a real and motherly interest in the children.

The school hours were long, from 8.30 to 12, and from 1.30 to 5, making a seven-hours day, whether the children were three, four, five, or six years of age. The Casa thus relieved the mothers of the children from all anxiety about them during the greater part of the day. Punctuality in arrival, though desired,

was not enforced. Often the children were, perhaps necessarily, taken out by their parents in the evening, and made up in the morning for the sleep that they lost at night. The close touch between directrice and parents, made possible by the position of the school in the midst of the homes and by the simplicity of the organization, enabled the directrice to dispense with a hard and fast rule in regard to punctuality of arrival.

Before the end of May, when the weather grew very hot, the children had no sleep in school. Then when some of the children began to lose weight owing to the heat, the doctor ordered them to sleep or rest in darkened rooms for two hours in the early afternoon. Previously, among the thirty-five children I saw none who appeared to need more sleep than they were getting, or who showed signs of fatigue at the end of the long school day. Their freshness at five o'clock never failed to excite my surprise, accustomed as I was to children tired out at the end of a shorter school day. I attribute this to two factors. First, the wisdom of trusting the children to choose for themselves when and for how long they will work, and, secondly, to the meal which they had, usually in the open, between four and five o'clock.

The food for this meal they brought with them from home in baskets, which were put away in an airy cupboard on their arrival. Although there was no time-

table, yet certain events repeated themselves daily with uniformity. One of these was assembling in the room with the piano about four o'clock. The children carried in their chairs and formed a big circle round the room. The cleanliness of their hands was examined. Then they either listened to the directrice, played the Silence Game devised by Dr. Montessori, or, what they liked better, played one of the singing games which they knew—one, for instance, about the spring, in which one of the children personating a butterfly moved round the room waving her arms to the music and approaching the children who represented flowers, or one of a didactic nature which described how they kept faces, ears, and hands clean. Then the baskets were brought out by one or two of the children and distributed. The whole party, carrying chairs, trooped down the steps into the garden, there to enjoy the good things contained in the baskets. Some brought eggs, some salad, some chocolate or apples, together with big pieces of bread. There was no attempt in connexion with this informal meal at anything but picnic manners. The children in these Case did not get the practice in table manners which the meal in the Via Giusti Convent School in Rome afforded. One thing, however, was strictly observed, no rubbish of any kind was left. Even the smallest pieces of paper were carefully gathered up and put by the children into the waste-paper basket.

I asked the directrice whether this was the last meal the children had during the day. She smiled at my question. It appeared that another meal succeeded this between six and seven in their homes. After this al fresco meal they usually washed their hands, and some occupied themselves in arranging the chairs in the working-rooms. All was left neat, and the children departed from school as clean as, or in some few cases cleaner than, when they came. They had charming little hands with well-kept nails. Their clothes were neat, and their hair clean and well brushed. They all had pocket-handkerchiefs, and learnt to use them. Before going they shook hands with all the grown-up people present. They did not tear out of school in an unmannerly way. To reach their homes they had only to cross the courtyard, and even the youngest could safely do this alone. They did so in a sober, well-behaved manner. Having been free all day to move about or sit as they pleased, they felt none of that rough exuberance which marks the exit from school of those who have been for hours deprived of their natural right to spontaneous movement.

Through spontaneous movement and practice in carrying about carefully the Montessorian material and other things they gained grace and ease of carriage. Their whole attitude was entirely free from what we call roughness. It was also marked by absence

of shyness and by fearlessness. There was a charm about them which was not to be found in the children of the infants' school in the adjoining street which I visited one morning on my way to the Casa. This was a school for children below the State school age, supported partly by endowment, partly by subscription. It had a garden, a refectory, and large spacious classrooms. But whatever the views expressed by Froebel in 'The Education of Man' as to liberty, the teaching here followed the plan of minute direction by the teacher. One lesson particularly impressed itself on my mind, a paper-folding lesson. Most of the children succeeded in following the directions. There were fifty of them sitting in rows. Three of the boys, probably five years of age, failed miserably and broke into a nervous sobbing which was distressing to see and hear. In the case of these three boys it would not be easy for them to show towards grown-up people that friendly trustful attitude which characterized the bambini of the Casa, where no such distress was ever to be found. I saw another lesson also which impressed me, not because, like the paper-folding, it was too difficult for some of the children, but because of the absurdity of giving to forty children minute directions as how to make a bed with Froebelian bricks, when they could all have made one for themselves without direction. I almost seemed to read in the faces of the children a humorous appreciation

of the situation. It was certainly a relief to return to the Via Solari, where the children were doing spontaneously exercises which at once promoted their development and their happiness.

The atmosphere here was one of freedom, for the directrice took Dr. Montessori's principle of liberty seriously, yet not, I think, with the unwisdom of exaggeration. It was spring weather, and it was natural for the children to wish to be much in the open air. There was plenty to be done in their little gardens, and tools and watering-cans were ready for their use. Usually when I was there a great deal of watering went on in the early morning. Needless to say the children were proud of their gardens. Some of them showed their love of flowers in a touching way. They lay down on the loose grey pebbles and gazed at the growing blossoms in the beds. The directrice was herself a lover of flowers. When opportunity offered she widened their nature study. In digging their gardens the children had come upon worms, to which they had shown aversion. This aversion she had tried to overcome by telling them of all that worms do for the soil. Sometimes in fine weather the children took their little baskets out into the fields, and there sought such treasures as children love to seek before eating their afternoon meal in the open.

It was rather a trial to me that during the time

I spent in this school the children frequently brought with them there live frogs. From what I learnt, the standard of consideration towards frogs in frog-eating Italy is somewhat lower than that of the boy in Aesop's Fables, and the poor frogs that came to school had a very sorry time of it notwithstanding all my efforts. I certainly prevented their putting the frogs in the basin of the fountain and throwing stones at them. Of this the directrice disapproved; but I found that she did not dislike, nay even enjoyed, seeing them being made to jump. All I could do, therefore, was to hope that the frogs were of an athletic nature and fond of keeping on jumping. It was naturally impossible to raise the standard of consideration above that of the directrice. Hers was certainly considerably higher than that of the street vendors.

The children came in and out of the garden as they pleased, and worked or not as they chose. A writer who signed herself 'M. or N.' in an article in the June *Journal of Education* gave an account of this Casa dei Bambini. I happened to be there at the time of her visit, which occupied something under an hour. She said: 'There the children were really free, and there was no sign of apparatus at all. The weather was no finer than it had been in Rome, but the children were spending the whole morning in the garden.' It was a fact that the weather was no finer than it had been in Rome; it was partly an

observation and partly an inference that the children were really free, but that the children were spending the whole morning in the garden was neither an observation nor a justifiable inference. A good many children were in the garden at the time of her visit, but I remember distinctly that some of the children were in the working-rooms playing with the Froebelian bricks. If they were not using some of the Montessorian material just then, it was the merest accident, for I never knew a morning or afternoon pass while I was there on which some of the material was not used. Any one who has grasped what the freedom of the children means, knows that even if all the children are in the garden between certain hours, they may all be inside later occupying themselves either with the material which they are free to take from the cabinets, with the building bricks, or at the blackboards.

The only way, indeed, to gain a true idea of the work of such a school is to stay among the children long enough to know them, with some small part of the knowledge possessed by the directrice. It is astonishing how interesting it is just to be an observer hour after hour among little creatures who are free
nifest their individual bents, and who make one
t of the school with touching friendliness.
no showing off in this Casa of the clever
is only gradually, for instance, that one

finds out that a certain sedate little maiden of five can write with considerable facility on the blackboard, or in an exercise book, any sentence which she takes it into her head that she wants to write, though since there are no miracles here, this is sometimes with faults of grammar or spelling. If she is writing on one of the many blackboards, these mistakes soon get corrected. It is one of the virtues of the blackboard writing that several children can write at once what they want to write, and all be under the observation of the directrice.

When the children wrote, as some of them did daily, short compositions in their exercise book, the directrice would sit beside them. A great deal of spontaneous learning went on in this way.

One could not watch the children without being struck by the different amounts of energy they showed. Some of the younger children were quite astonishing. There was one little girl, Bruna by name, almost or just four years of age—I forget which—fair-haired, blue-eyed, with a command of language surprising for her years. She was one of those children who are demonstratively affectionate, but ready to transfer this affection to the latest comer. Probably spoilt at home, she liked to be the centre of attention. If there was any visitor present whom she could induce to occupy the little chair which she placed beside her own and to watch her work, she

would always do so. During the time that I spent in the school, I had ample opportunity of observing the strong appeal which the Montessorian material made to her. Very often, it is true, she built with the Froebelian bricks. These were kept in two large boxes in that state of confusion loved neither by Froebel nor by Dr. Montessori. The neat little Froebelian boxes, one for each child, had been discarded. As I sat at the table with Bruna, watching her as she tried to cover the large brick-box with her small chubby arms to prevent the other children from sharing the bricks, I realized the advantage of Froebel's plan from the point of view of order. The intervention of the directrice was constantly required when Bruna had the bricks and other children wanted them, but she was usually speedily won over to share them. She was even learning to keep calm when one or other of the children came and overthrew the castle she had built. They certainly loved, though not unkindly, to tease her, and she was receiving a training from their hands which she could not possibly have received in an atmosphere of less freedom.

It was curious that the altercations that arose over the building bricks never, as far as my experience went, arose over the Montessorian material proper. The colour tablets were great favourites, and several times a day Bruna would arrange the pairs of different shades of some one colour, yellow, perhaps, or red, in

descending order. The doing of this requires the closest attention, for there is so little difference between some of the shades that a very careful scrutiny is necessary in order to be able to do it successfully. If Bruna made mistakes, she did not necessarily correct them herself, as she was obliged to do with the solid insets, where the putting of one inset into a wrong hole leaves one which will not go into any hole. I found that if I pointed out mistakes while she was arranging the shades, her interest in doing so diminished. The plan of the directrice was to let her finish, and then, without saying anything, to exchange any two shades which were wrongly placed. Very often Bruna would arrange the series correctly, but not even an adult could do so without fully concentrated attention. It seemed to me that these colour tablets were doing a good deal for Bruna with her boundless energy and quickly diverted attention. They set her a task which was not too long to get finished, but which could not be done even imperfectly without a high degree of concentrated discriminative attention. Further, the exercise was not complete until the tablets had been replaced in their proper compartment in the box and the box in the cabinet, unless wanted by other children. With little new-comers this habit of orderliness had to be inculcated. The vigilance of the directrice and of the elder children was required.

strong imitative faculty of little children came into play. Example achieved what, no doubt, precept alone would have failed in doing.

Not only were the buttoning frames great favourites of the children, but the cylindrical and the geometrical insets also. The directrice needed no special vigilance when the children were occupied with these. An English professor of education, referring to the Montessori material, spoke as though the children would succeed with and exhaust the interest of this fitting in of cylinders in a very short space of time. This, however, was not the case. Watching the children at work, one perceived great differences in their modes of procedure. With some children the method seemed to be one of fortuitous trying. Having selected one hole to fill, the child would take up the insets one after another, until at last one was taken up that fitted. I was many times astonished by seeing children trying to fit one of the largest cylinders into one of the smallest holes. The children who made most use of their sense of touch in measuring the span or depth of the hole succeeded best. The directrice could, of course, discover how far the sense of touch was made use of by blindfolding the child. They did not here, however, make much use of blindfolding. It was only done once during the time I was there, and that at my request. Children of calm temperament set to work quietly when blind-

folded, and inserted the cylinders and geometrical insets at varying speeds. Being blindfolded appeared to excite Bruna remarkably. It seemed as though she must tear off the bandage. Yet, if the opinion of the teachers at the Fielden School in Manchester is correct, that exercises done blindfold are beneficial to children of easily diverted attention, Bruna would have benefited by being gradually accustomed to work blindfold.

One of the most popular occupations here, as elsewhere, was the filling in of outlines with coloured crayons. There was no giving out of the coloured pencils, which would have savoured too much of ordinary school practice. When the children wanted them, one of them or the directrice set the box with compartments in which the different colours were kept on the table, and the children helped themselves from the box. One heard even the little ones calling the colours by name. If they wanted yellow they took yellow, and when they had finished with the yellow pencil they put it back. This, of course, afforded great opportunity for the exercise of good manners. Further, it taught them that sometimes one has to go without what one wants or to wait for it, surely a valuable lesson. It is quite a mistake to interpret the principle of liberty as meaning that the children get all they want at the moment of wanting it. This is far from being the case. The

conditions in the Case dei Bambini approximate much more to those of real life than do those of an ordinary school, where everything required is passed round, and where the children have very little responsibility as to the care of the material used.

The first outlines filled in by the children are made by themselves with the metal geometrical insets. The simplest is a frame with a circular hole into which fits a circular plate. Dr. Montessori tells us that the child will draw round the circular hole, and then placing the circular plate over it will draw round that, thus getting a double circle. In this way the child will arrive at the idea of an edge which is the same, though made by means of two objects, which look as different as a frame with a circular hole and a circular plate. In actual working this drawing of the double line tends to get left out. They did not here, as far as my experience went, draw both frame and plate. Bruna, for instance, whose first attempts I watched, used only the metal frame. The first day she tried, she only kept her pencil against the edge with difficulty. The next day she succeeded much better, though her rapid, impetuous method of working was not so conducive to getting a good unbroken line as the quieter procedure of less impulsive children. I may mention in passing that though Bruna had used the wooden geometrical insets, yet she had not used the cards with blue paper geometrical

figures, nor the cards on which these figures are represented in outline. I only saw these last used once while I was there, and then the little girl got out all the cards at once and set them all round a large group of tables. She did not find the exercise very interesting. It seemed a mistake to get out so many cards at once. The directrice said this part of the material made no appeal to the children, and she complained that the outlined geometrical figures were mostly so drawn that it was impossible to superpose the edge of the wooden geometrical inset on the blue line. The English makers have remedied this defect, but if Dr. Montessori could supply information about the amount of use this part of the material really gets in the various schools using her material, and exactly what loss the children sustain when they drop this part, as was apparently mostly the case in the Via Solari, it would be interesting.

To return to Bruna, however, she had seen the elder children using coloured pencils to fill in outlines, and she was quite satisfied to make her outline with the metal frame. Then having chosen a pencil from the box, she proceeded to fill in the circle with colour, just as a little child scribbles. At first the lines often went beyond the outline and patches were left uncovered. These patches the directrice would point out to her, saying 'not coloured'. Gradually the colouring grew more uniform and was kept better

within the outline. From day to day, for she spontaneously returned to this exercise at some time or other every day, her hand gained mastery over the pencil, and she was being prepared to write, though of course she was unaware of this. It was her progress in the actual operation of colouring which gave her satisfaction.

It is best, perhaps, to regard this colouring of outlines as a preparation both for art work and for writing. It fixes the child's knowledge of colours, and when more complex outlines begin to be drawn by using several frames and several colours to fill in the different parts, it involves aesthetic training in the harmonizing of shades. There was considerable difference in this respect between the different schools. As preparation for writing Dr. Montessori has explained that the number of strokes made in the filling in of even a simple circle would fill many pages of a copy-book if set out separately. It is no wonder, therefore, that the child's mastery over the pencil grows rapidly. One has only to watch the children at work, learning gradually to make long even parallel strokes with absorbed interest and increasing ease, to feel sure that whatever psychologists or physiologists may say about only using the larger muscles at first, there is no going against nature in this exercise. It is only using the instinct of scribbling which every child shows for a higher purpose.

In Via Solari each child had an exercise book for his coloured outlines. These were kept in a drawer in one of the cabinets. Each piece of work was dated by the directrice, and one could follow by means of the dates the rate of progress of any particular child. This keeping and dating of the coloured outlines gives them importance and value, and helps to arouse in the child a sense of his progress and to develop his power of self-criticism. It is a developed self-criticism and not emulation which is the lever used in these schools to secure improvement. The competitive spirit is wholly absent. In all the time I spent in the Via Solari I never heard there, any more than I did in any of the other schools, one child pitted against another. There is a recognition of difference of gifts. The work of each child is praised, not because it excels that of other children, but because it is an advance on what he has done before. The growth of each child is watched for and recognized. Since originally children are no more mentally facsimiles of one another than they are physically, there are differences in their ways of growth. The atmosphere which favours their growth is happy and moral on account of this absence of emulation and this appreciation of individuality.

Free drawing gives further preparation for art work, and since in this great differences of gifts show themselves, free drawing gives the directrices an

insight into the children's interests. Some of the children were often at the blackboard drawing trains and houses, just the kind of things which we know children of that age love to draw. In the Via Solari aeroplanes were not yet among the things drawn as in one of the slum schools in Rome. A permanent record of some of these free drawings was to be found in some of the drawing-books, interspersed between the coloured outlines, and, like them, dated.

Later on, when the difficulties of filling in outlines had been mastered and the interest felt in the geometrical outlines had diminished, the directrice both in Via Solari and Viale Lombardia made outlined pictures with the help of tracing-paper of such a nature as to appeal to childish interests. These, with their finer detail, necessarily made more demands on the care and skill of the children. It seems to me that while the colouring of the geometrical figures exercised mainly the hand and arm muscles, in this finer work the finger muscles came into play. I did not realize from reading Dr. Montessori's book how much of this kind of work the children do. She says, of course, that the practice of filling in outlines must not be given up even when facility in writing has been gained, because it helps to improve the writing by increasing the mastery over the pencil while making appeal to interests quite unconnected with writing. She points out, too, how these outline pictures afford training in

correct perception. At first a child may make a hen crimson, but gradually he comes to realize that his choice of colours is subject to objective conditions, and in colouring goats he will try to remember the goats he has seen—in the Viale Lombardia, doubtless, those grazing on a piece of waste ground near the tenements with, when the air was clear, a background of snow-mountains. Or when he colours a hen, he will think of one of those in the school fowl-pen, or in the Viale Lombardia of that tiny bird that ran about among the grass in the courtyard with her tinier chickens, mere balls of fluff.

It seemed to me that if the training of the directrices had included a course of nature study such as we understand it, they might have made use of outline drawings of a much greater variety of natural objects in order to widen the observational range of the children. For this purpose all that would be necessary was to keep within the Casa the animals or insects they drew, so that the children could look at them when they wanted to. The children would thus gain manipulative skill, perceptual training, and training of the colour sense. Had the children had outline pictures of frogs to colour, they might have adopted a more passive attitude towards them which would have allowed of some respite on the part of the frog from saltatory exercise. This idea occurred to me in Via Solari, and I was interested to find that in Rome some publisher,

I think, had presented a few copies of an expensive nature-study book containing pictures for the children to colour. These very beautiful pictures were so large and complicated that it took even the cleverest of the older children several hours to colour one of them. Coloured facsimiles were provided in the book as copies, and no attempt was made to bring the children to actual perception of the objects portrayed. Aesthetic training, and perhaps for the author, though certainly not for the child, scientific interest was the main thing in view. I have a vivid recollection of a brilliant scarlet fungus in its natural environment which reminded me of some of our finds on fungus forays, but which was not of a kind likely to have been seen by the children. Another picture showed a bat clinging to the eave of a roof. A very intelligent boy of six was colouring this in a careful and skilful manner, but he probably had never seen a bat, for he persisted in having the picture upside down, as he would not have done if he had realized what a bat was really like. Simple outlines of snails, beetles, birds, caterpillars, and frogs, which the children could easily have seen for themselves, would have had far more educational value.

One of the difficulties of nature study, as we carry it on with collective teaching and large classes, is the number of specimens required. Perhaps as a consequence of this lessons on the more easily obtainable

material are apt to get repeated, and if the teacher is not one of the genuine enthusiasts, some of the children may end by getting bored. If the children, however, could choose for themselves such outline pictures and were free to move to where the snails or beetles were, before setting about the colouring, then fewer specimens would be necessary and the danger of boredom eliminated. In neither school in Milan did I see children attempting to draw from nature, but with the free access which they had to the open, they had all the occupations they wanted. In Rome it was different, but of this I must speak later.

Further preparation for writing involved several lines of activity. The speech training was of the greatest importance. This the directrice was continually giving the children in the informal conversations which she had with them. They talked constantly, both among themselves and with her, and they learnt to pronounce properly and clearly. She noted babyish lisps which had to be cured, and she practised the children in giving the full value to the sound and the correct accent in the words which they used. This was easy in the short individual lessons, in which such words as circle, cylinder, &c., were learnt, or the names of the colours, stuffs, &c., easier than in connexion with the words which were part of their home vocabulary. This practice in careful pronunciation taught them to appreciate letter-sounds

in the words, and they were consequently ready to associate the letter-sound with the form of the letter when they began to use the sand-paper letters.

When I was there, Bruna had just reached this stage. She had, as I have said, a great command of language, and her interest was directed towards the letters, though the only one of which she was certain was an *r*. At the sight and feel of this letter, she trilled it out with a facility which I, who had never been able to produce the trilled *r* sound, envied. She liked going round the letters with her first and second fingers. Very frequently she seized my finger and dragged it round. The sensations which I received from this contact with the roughened surface were not, I must confess, pleasurable; but this only shows with what caution one must infer from one's own feelings to those of a child. If, as Dr. Montessori does, one takes as a reliable test of a child's feelings the readiness and frequency with which he performs a certain operation when quite free to carry it on or not as he pleases, then certainly these sand-paper letters are acceptable to children.

It is customary to begin with some of the vowels, and then being guided by the child's likings to choose a few consonants, but each consonant is at once joined with the vowels to form syllables, though the consonant sound is repeated separately so as to isolate it from the syllable.

Then the boxes of pink and blue paper letters are used when the child can recognize the letters learnt with certainty and can pick them out on hearing the sound. The directrice says a word, then gives the sounds of the letters separately, and the child picks out from the box the letter corresponding to each sound. The letters are put together to form the word, which child and directrice read. It adds to the child's interest if the word is read by an older child or another grown-up person.

In this way, first by means of the sand-paper letters and then by means of the blue and pink movable letters all the letters are mastered, and from words the composition extends to phrases. Some children will write for themselves when only a few of the letters have been learnt and when consequently only a few words can be written. Others prefer to master all the letters first.

Very often this composition with the movable letters would be done out of doors. A table and chairs were carried out, and then the big boxes containing the paper letters. By watching these being taken from their compartments in the boxes and by seeing them replaced, the younger children as mere spectators often advance far on the path of letter-sound knowledge.

Of course Italian children have the advantage of having to learn a language in which one letter has

one sound, and words can be built up out of regularly formed syllables. This regularity makes it possible for them to attack successfully long words when pronounced clearly enough for them to recognize the syllables. On the other hand, their language has more grammatical difficulties than has English.

Some English critics have suggested that tracing the sand-paper letters with their fingers is, for the children, a meaningless process. Probably these critics do so only because they do not realize all the activities going on in the working-rooms of the Casa dei Bambini. Were we to introduce the material into a class in our infants' schools without modifying other conditions, we might have fifty infants engaged in tracing sand-paper letters with only the vaguest glimmering of what it all meant. But where Antonietta, a child of five, is writing on one blackboard, Edoardo, not quite five, on another, Giulio is making words with the pink and blue letters, and Pietro is sitting with a pile of sand-paper letters which he traces successively, giving the corresponding letter-sound as he does so, there Bruna knows quite well what she is about and where it is leading, when she traces for the first time one of these letters and imitates the sound which the directrice makes as she does so.

These very conditions, however, make impossible explosions into writing such as Dr. Montessori

describes in her book. The children learn to write when they are ready to write and want to do so. The rates at which the children learn writing differ greatly. Some children learn in a very short time, and their writing is excellent from the first. In some cases children who have learnt how to write do not derive much pleasure from doing so. I was speaking about writing one day with the directrice in the Via Solari, and she said, pointing out one little girl, 'Marta can write, but she never does.' Only a few minutes later Marta, who had heard this, came up to a blackboard, together with another little girl, whom I had never seen write. Dividing the board between them, both began to write and continued doing so for some time. Marta could indeed write quite well. The reason for her disinclination I did not discover. She formed a great contrast to such a child as Antoinetta, who wrote something every day.

It is the study of these personal differences which makes the work so interesting for the directrice. What we want are records which relate to such points as this. Was the difference between Marta and Antonietta one which depended on home environment, or did it depend on a difference of nature? There are some children who take up interests which they rapidly drop, there are others who persist in their interests and tend to form spontaneously habits of daily repetition. It might be that in this case Marta's

distaste for writing arose from inability to spell, perhaps due to defective pronunciation or hearing, or it might have arisen from lack of sufficient initiative to frame sentences.

It is necessary to remember that only script letters are used, and that writing, as a rule, precedes any but the reading involved in writing. The first real reading, that is the learning of the thoughts or wishes of others from the symbols in which they are expressed, is also of words and sentences written in script letters. This reading interests some few children more than the writing, but this did not seem to be the case with any of the children in the Via Solari. I do not think that any of the children here had made the transition from script to print letters, which seems to take place so naturally. The only picture-books they had, had German and not Italian text. Italian children do not seem to be so well catered for as are the children of English-speaking countries. But there seem to be distinct advantages in confining all the early efforts to script letters. It conduces to much greater clearness, facility and beauty in the writing of the children. It is a point which needs serious consideration, how far it is wise to let so many English children either write first in print letters, learn the print before the script letters, or learn the two simultaneously. Spelling is undoubtedly learnt more through correct writing than through reading, and with the writing,

as taught in the Case dei Bambini, goes the habit of correct pronunciation. But experiments are needed on these points. It must, however, be remembered that no method of teaching writing can be called Montessorian unless it includes a thorough training in the pronunciation of the words to be written. No objections to an early practice of the art of writing can be made on the score of eyesight because of the large size of the script letters used.

With regard to arithmetical work, I was not able to form much opinion. If I were rash, I should say that what I saw justified the opinion that children of three to six do not spontaneously take to number work. Yet no doubt in the winter number work, like all the material, made a stronger appeal. One day while I was there one boy did some sums on one of the boards, and several times the long stair was taken out. But speaking of it the directrice said that the children did not easily reach the idea of counting the longer rods in terms of the shortest decimetre rod. They wanted to count the number of rods irrespective of length, disregarding the red and blue colourings. The English makers have made a long stair of uniform colour so that the rods may be arranged in order of length and perhaps counted, that is so that the preliminary exercises may be got through, before advance is made to the red and blue long stair. I do not feel at all certain that the directrices in Milan

understood the valuable use which can be made of the red and blue long stair.

Much has been said of the way in which the children shake hands with visitors and with the grown-up people present on coming and going. It seemed to me an admirable custom and to be good for the children, though it is not quite easy to say how and why. For one thing I think it made them value clean hands, and it certainly helped to do away with self-conscious shyness, and to inculcate a spirit of friendliness and self-possession. It was, of course, sometimes a little embarrassing to the visitor to be greeted by a score or so of little outstretched hands. But not to pass over any one desiring a handshake is part of the courtesy demanded of a guest who finds his way into the children's house, and one soon recognizes that it is best to take it seriously and to devote one's whole attention for the time being to the operation of handshaking. Often it happens that one of the elder children draws one's attention to the hand of one of the little ones whom he thinks is being overlooked. Perhaps this handshaking really symbolizes the Copernican change in the relation of the children to the school. Strange as it may seem, in many places, in many lands, it has not dawned on the people concerned that schools exist for the sake of the children.

The altered relation of the teacher to the children

was, of course, indicated by the choice of the title directrice, instead of the more familiar one of head-mistress. The directrice guides the children; she does not seek to coerce any more than she seeks to bribe to good conduct. During the time I spent in the Via Solari I never saw any child whose will came into conflict with that of the directrice. The relations between the adults and children were entirely trustful and loving. There were occasional collisions between the children themselves when two or more of them wanted the same thing, but when the directrice intervened they never seemed to doubt the justice of her ruling. Contrarient suggestion, as Mr. Keating calls it, seemed absent from these schools. The atmosphere was one of real courtesy, and the directrice in the Via Solari could be her natural self, cheerful, alert, composed, and enjoying the children as one can only enjoy them when they are free to reveal themselves, and when one is conscious that one need not drag them to a certain level of achievement to meet the requirements of others, whether it is good for them to be so dragged or not.

If the children did not learn to write and read there, they learnt in the lowest class of the Municipal School. There was consequently no attempt to force growth. Some of the children, both directrices said, left them without being able to write and read. But they did not regard the learning of writing and reading

as the all-important thing. The growth of graces of character occupied the centre of their field of vision. Such graces showed themselves in neatness and order, in cleanliness, in deftness, in courtesy, in helpfulness, in kindness, in reliability. I do not remember asking about truthfulness and honesty. Where children are not cowed, there seems no occasion for untruthfulness. The work with the material conduced to accuracy and clearness of statement. Confusion was prevented by the brief simple teaching and by banishing the adventitious wrappings in which the instruction given to children is so often enveloped from a mistaken idea of what constitutes interest. As for honesty, the material in the cupboards was open to all, but it did not disappear, and I never saw anything that looked like an attempt to preserve the school property from the depredations of the children. When we know that it has been found necessary, even in a respectable working-class neighbourhood in London, to make the children give up at the door of the feeding centre the fork and spoon which they have been using in order to avoid disappearances, I think we may well ask whence comes this difference, and regard it as an ethical problem which needs elucidating. Can the changed attitude of the children to the school account for this desirable moral elevation?

As the Humanitarian Society allowed no religious teaching and the children had neither hymns nor

prayers, it could not be accounted for by any religious teaching given at school. While the war-song 'Tripoli', however, was sung with vigour in the neighbouring kindergarten, its introduction into the Casa dei Bambini would have been forbidden by the Humanitarian Society as being subversive of the atmosphere in which they wished the children to grow up.

No system of inspection existed in the school. A great deal of responsibility was thrown on the young directrice. As regards physical well-being she had the co-operation and help of the doctor who came regularly. I did not see anything of the parents, but undoubtedly an important part of the directrice's work was keeping in touch with them. They disapproved of the school baths and the bath was practically unused. But the children came to school clean, so that perhaps the school bath had done its work.

CHAPTER II

THE CASA DEI BAMBINI IN THE VIALE LOMBARDIA, MILAN

I HAVE described the Casa dei Bambini in the Via Solari first because it is older, although those connected with the Humanitarian Society now regard the newer as their principal and finer school.

The two working-rooms of this new Casa are large

and beautiful. The one leads directly from the other. The second one opens by way of a railed platform and a descending flight of steps into the enclosure at the back. The first one has a door, usually closed, however, into the garden in the front of the Casa on the courtyard side.

In certain respects the plan of the Casa in the Via Solari excels that of this new Casa. In the latter the lavatory and offices are in one room, and this room is one which leads off from the second working-room, whereas in the Via Solari the offices are in a separate room, not close to the working-rooms. It is a disadvantage, too, that there is only one flight of steps to the enclosure and that the walls of this cannot be slid down. Although the garden in front of the Casa has a fountain and is of fair size, yet it plays no part in the life of the children. The directrice attributed this to its aspect. The sun, she said, was on it the whole day. Consequently the children had no gardening interest as the children in the other Casa had, and this was a serious loss.

They had, however, free access to the pebbly enclosure, and they came in and out as they chose. Very often, too, the directrice had a table carried out, and the word-building with the pink and blue letters was often done there.

In this Casa there were sixty-five children. One little boy was under three, and in his case it was

certainly a disadvantage that until the doctor ordered an afternoon rest towards the end of May, there was no sleep in school. The number of the staff was the same as in the other Casa. The assistant and the cleaner in this Casa hardly seemed to have the sympathetic insight into the ideal behind the work that was shown by the helpers in the Via Solari. Practically all the teaching done was done by the directrice, and unless she had given the children the complete freedom they had to go out and come in as they chose, she could not have managed to teach sixty-five children individually.

The arrangements here closely resembled those in the Via Solari, where the directrice had been directrice before, and the spirit and behaviour of the children was very similar, with this difference, that owing to the absence of Froebelian bricks, the disputes between the children were in general confined to the pebbly enclosure. What toys the children had had, had with few exceptions been destroyed, and the few remaining picture-books were fast undergoing the same fate. I felt that it was an unnecessary freedom accorded to a little child of three when he was not prevented from scribbling over a photographic group of the children which could not be replaced. Yet, although this destruction of toys had gone on, the Montessorian material was as carefully used and put away in as orderly a manner here as elsewhere.

One feature in which this Casa differed from the other was in the greater frequency with which the parents came into the school. Some mothers were constantly in and out, and a visitor had the opportunity of seeing the happy relations which existed between them and the directrice. They seemed to feel for her the same devotion that was felt by the children and to come under the influence of her kindly, gentle tranquillity. She took me into one of the homes. Italian workmen, I was told, like big rooms and could not live in the cramped space with which English workmen are satisfied. The flat I saw consisted of two large rooms, with a light airy pantry, in which was kept an array of beautiful copper cooking utensils such as one would never see in an English artisan's home. The windows looked out into the wide and beautiful courtyard, whose green grass contrasted pleasantly with the gleaming white walls of the tenements. Quite near, beyond the pebbly enclosure of the children and outside the courtyard of the Humanitarian Society's flats, was the fine building which contained the municipal washhouses and the municipal library. For next to the tenements of the Humanitarian Society there were blocks belonging to the municipality. It was the windows of these flats that one saw as one sat on the platform watching the children at play, and it was seldom that some of their occupants were not standing outside

the railing also engaged in looking at the children as they sat or played on the pebbles.

These pebbles were the reason why the directrice's bandages and skill in tending wounds with antiseptics taken from her little medicine chest so often came into play. Such ministrations endeared her to the children. One saw considerable endurance shown by the wounded. The directrice's tranquillity seemed to become a possession of the children.

Although there was also a piano here, it was, to the children's loss, a silent piano. Yet they managed without it to learn many little songs and musical games, and these they would sing when they had brought in chairs and made a big circle in the second working-room and had shut out some of the sunshine by means of the shutters. Here in this tempered light they would sometimes play the silence game. Often they would sit still while the directrice talked to her assistant. Sometimes she would practise them in acts of politeness, such as passing a knife or scissors to any grown-up person present. Each morning and afternoon when they were sitting round in this big circle, she would appoint two children to go round the circle to examine the hands, faces, necks, and ears of the others. It was a comic sight to see one child turning another child's head over first to the right and then to the left so that the condition of its ears might be seen. Those who did not pass this

examination had at once to go off to wash, and they went without demur, even if, as sometimes happened, they had been passed by the first examiner before rejection by the second.

There were, as in the other Casa, many blackboards, and a great deal of free drawing of an imaginative kind was done by the elder children. They were also fond of working in plasticine and of filling up the outlined pictures, made by the directrice, with the coloured pencils. The directrice, although she aimed at carrying out Dr. Montessori's ideal, was too independent to give up her own judgment, and she often told the children stories, sometimes in the working-room surrounded by the children, generally the elder ones, who wanted to listen, but more often seated on a little chair in the pebbly enclosure.

It very often happened while I was there that groups of the youngest children came in between three and four o'clock and set to work with the material at the tables or on the floor of the working-rooms. There was one child just three who came for the first time while I was there. For the first day or two she went about with ridiculously streaming eyes, clinging to the hand of a kindly and self-denying elder sister. Gradually the pink tower began to exercise a counter-attraction, and at length her courage rose to the pitch of letting her try it alone. Of course in such a case the directrice wisely left the child to herself.

In the case, however, of another little girl who was a fresh arrival during the time I was there, and who settled down very speedily with remarkable self-possession, by short individual lessons with the material the directrice tested her powers in various directions, and whether it was with the colour-matching or with the solid insets, or the broad stair, she always found this child able to understand what had to be done and to repeat for herself. In a very short time she could do more than children who had been there longer, and it was interesting to observe how she made herself respected as they sat in social fashion in the pebbly enclosure.

One day I watched a little boy having a lesson with the broad stair. The directrice arranged the blocks stair-fashion, then mixed them up and left him to do it. He arranged them, but not in order of height. Once more she arranged them, then as he again failed to put them in the right order, she took them away. A short time after, to my amusement, I saw an elder girl with the broad stair properly arranged on the floor. She had the little boy by the hand and she made him walk up and down the stair. It was her way of making him understand the arrangement of the pieces. I think in this case the directrice would hardly have had the heart to stop this improper use of the material. The children taught one another a good deal, but seldom in such a novel way.

Here again I thought more might have been done with the long stair. The amount of arithmetic I saw done was inconsiderable. More might have been done at times of the year when the pebbly enclosure offered less counter-attraction. It was wonderful how this enclosure drew the children into it, and how much they preferred sitting and talking outside to doing the same thing in the rooms. An American visitor, who was there when I was, remarked as we stood watching them in the enclosure that it looked very inane. All I could say was that at any rate the children liked it. I did think sometimes that a sandpit and some spades and something to slide down would have been a desirable addition to the equipment. As it was they dug the pebbles with their hands.

Of course things happened that would horrify English schoolmistresses. A little girl whose chief passion was skipping often skipped in the working-room. On the last afternoon I was there one of the elder boys was carrying a very sedate little girl of tiny build about the playground head downmost by her feet. She was suitably clad for the exercise. Her face when at intervals she resumed her normal position expressed nothing but delight, and no one interfered. But it was a sight that did not quite accord with one's ordinary views of propriety. However, one concluded that such views had stood in need of revision. There was really no harm in it as it was done.

Sometimes the cleaner brought ironing to do and did it there before the children. It was no doubt good for them to see it. They could watch or not as they chose. So spacious was the room that it interfered with no one.

When the time came for the doctor to order afternoon sleep because of the hot sunshine which poured from a blue sky and exhausted the children, the rooms could be darkened, but the children had to lie on tables or chairs. They kept quite still. The few who could not sleep found their way to the vestibule and sat there quietly in comparative cool. Perhaps some day some more comfortable provision for this afternoon rest will be made.

No one could be long in the school without noticing how the directrice by speech exercise paved the way for the letter-work. Very gently she would make the child re-articulate the sound he had mis-sounded, and one realized how the children had had their attention drawn to the letter-sounds long before they came to the use of the letters. This was sometimes in the course of the quiet little talks which she had with the children, sometimes it was when she heard one child talking with another. Going about among the children with the freedom that was accorded to visitors here, one became aware of how much of this work was done. Owing to it the child comes to the sand-paper letters prepared. Here, as in the Via Solari,

it was not easy to form an estimate of all the children could do, because no attempt was made to show off any cleverness. Fifteen of the sixty-five children could write, but one at least of the elder boys was defective. One almost guessed this when one saw their behaviour in the playground. The normal boys were remarkably kind to the younger children, and one admired their polite and sensible behaviour, but there was one boy with an abnormally large head who was often to be seen teasing the other children. When children are free to do as they please, it is not difficult to distinguish between the normal and abnormal.

Very little reproving was done. Disputes went on in the playground, but for the most part no one interfered, and it ended, I suppose, in the most determined becoming masters of the situation. I was often struck by the sudden fizzling out of what looked likely to become a fierce fight. The atmosphere was one of tranquillity, love, and trust, and the children who breathed it were, each in his or her own way, charming and interesting. They suffered neither from over-pampering nor from over-stimulation.

The afternoon meal in the open was also customary here. Although the children, as a rule, went to their homes round the courtyard for their midday meal, yet exceptions were made. One little boy of four who had lost his mother often stayed during the

midday recess. He brought his meal with him and ate it at one of the working-tables. Occasionally he had as companion some little girl whose mother was going out for the day. It seemed to me from what I saw that the good of the children was the one thing that dictated what was to be done. The Casa truly belonged to the children. They felt that it was theirs, and their kindness and courtesy to strangers was very touching. The visitor was for the time being made one of the community. Of course this attitude of the children was the result of the attitude of the directrice. She did not seem to regard visitors as a bother. Often and often she would send one of the children for me when I was watching them elsewhere because she was going to give one of the individual lessons which she thought would interest me. She laid down no rules for the visitors. One day a Froebelian teacher, an Italian, was there. This teacher went down into the enclosure where the children played and started the children on some of the games which she was accustomed to play. The directrice let her do what she liked. I think it interested her to see just which of the children joined in these games and for how long they were attracted by them. Of course, if the children liked to play them after the visitor had gone, well and good. If a visitor came who could play the piano she was always glad to make use of her.

The directrice was responsible for the conduct of the Casa dei Bambini, and no one could talk to her without being struck by the whole-hearted way in which she entered into this responsibility. If a child were away ill the first thing she did in the evening was to visit the child in its home. She lived in the midst of the homes of these children who were for so many hours a day in her charge and whom she loved.

These two Case dei Bambini in Milan constitute a type of nursery school, unique in their method and spirit. This method would be impossible without the direct access to the open and the great freedom permitted to the children. Its success also depends on the long hours, for without these long hours the directrices could not possibly give enough individual lessons to secure progress. As it is, some children will do nothing all day, except, of course, come under the social training which leads to the formation of desirable personal habits. Without the Montessori material the directrices could not do what they do. They regard it as essential to their method. One of them told me that she tried the Froebelian paper-weaving with the children; for though they base their work on Dr. Montessori's ideas, they do not do so slavishly. But she found that the paper-weaving was far more fatiguing than was good for the children. In both Case the children go to their homes at the end of the long day without showing signs of fatigue.

Nor did the directrices show signs of fatigue. Of course both were young, but no one can say that in England young teachers do not show signs of fatigue.

CHAPTER III

THE OPEN AIR, SCHOOL IN VERONA

In the second Italian edition of Dr. Montessori's book there is a photograph showing writing done by one of the children in the open-air school in Verona. It was this picture that gave me the idea of going to Verona. The secretary of the Humanitarian Society in Milan kindly gave me a letter to the municipal doctor in Verona, under whose charge this school was.

Accordingly I presented myself with this letter at the Municipio at Verona, and was dispatched under escort to the open-air school, which was situated on the side of the steep slope which led up from the Adige to the Castello. We mounted up many stone steps. A wooden unpretentious door opened into the garden of the house which was devoted to the open-air school. The children in attendance were delicate children out of the first and second grades of the municipal school. The garden was long and narrow; one part in front of the house was devoted to the children of the first grade, the wider terrace beyond the house was given up to the second grade children,

who were being taught by a young teacher. Between the class and the parapet which bounded the garden on its river side was a part shaded by a canopy of vine on an overhead trellis. Looking up at the blue sky between the vine-leaves, and then looking down at the blue Adige racing along at the foot of the slope, and at the same time realizing all the romantic charm which the grey walls, towers, and turrets beyond the river stood for, I was glad that I had been lured to Verona, although, as I soon found, this was no real Montessori school.

The teacher under whom the writing pictured in the book had been done, had left Verona for Rome. The teacher in charge had worked with her for a time, having before that been a teacher in one of the ordinary schools. She was very kind, but she devoted herself to me with a zeal which sadly interfered with the day's proceedings for the children. The terrace on which her children were working was in the shade. A low wall divided it from the bed which sloped up from the terrace. The children utilized this wall as a rest for the slates, on which they began to draw when my coming interrupted the dictation which they were doing in their books. Some ducklings ran in and out among them, and in the shed at the side of the house was a goat of which they were all exceedingly proud. They regarded the possession of this goat as a unique characteristic of their school.

They had learnt to write with the help of the sand-paper letters, and they had games which involved reading script. I saw one of these. The folded slips of paper which were distributed one to each child bore the names of flowers written in script characters. The children opened them and each child read her own, so that she knew when it was her turn to run to the teacher, who called successively the flowers, whose names were written on the slips.

Much of the material used was home-made, and most of the teaching was collective. The work done was that of the ordinary first grade, though done out of doors whenever the weather permitted. In winter the classes used the rooms in the house. The children came out of the first and second grades and returned to them when the doctor allowed them to return to the ordinary schools. The classes were less than half the size of the ordinary classes, so that the children had much more individual attention, and a great deal of the restraint of the ordinary school was dispensed with. They had at midday a good meal of soup and bread at long tables under the vine-covered trellis, but they were waited on and there was no attempt to utilize the meal for the cultivation of independence and good manners. After the meal there was a short afternoon session, a good deal of which was devoted to ordinary drill exercises done at the word of command when the sun was on the garden. It was in

the heat of the afternoon that the whole party, teachers, children, and myself, set off down the steep steps. The hours for the open-air school were the same as for the ordinary school, so that, instead of being able in the afternoon to watch several hours' work, I found that all speedily was over for the day. The teachers accompanied the children down the steps for fear they should fall, but at the bottom they went their several ways.

I accompanied the head teacher on the visit she had to pay in accordance with daily custom to the head master, in whose direction the schools were, and to whom the more than a hundred mistresses in Verona paid a daily visit to report on the day's work and to hand in the scheme for the next day. My presence had prevented the carrying through of the day's scheme, so that I felt it incumbent on me to accompany her. I found the director very pleasant. His relations with the mistresses were evidently sympathetic, and as far as I could judge the mistress I went with saw nothing to cavil at in these daily reports. She evidently thought it a help in doing the work thoroughly. Remembering the young teachers in Milan with their whole-hearted zeal and the profound interest they took in their work, I smiled. Seeing the Montessorian work of Verona made me appreciate all the more, if that were possible, what Milan had done.

CHAPTER IV

THE SCHOOLS OF THE 'BENI STABILI' SOCIETY IN ROME, VIA MARSI 58

FROM Verona I went to Rome, and not back to Milan as I had intended doing if Dr. Montessori had gone there with a number of her students, according to the plan which she had at one time formed, and which, owing to the disinclination of the students to incur the expense involved, fell through. The students were still in Rome when I arrived there, and although I had received a letter from Dr. Montessori, written by her secretary, promising me every facility in seeing her work in Rome, yet while the schools which the students used for observation were still being visited by them, it seemed better to utilize my time in seeing the tenement schools in which Dr. Montessori's first work among normal children was done.

These I should have wished to see in any case, notwithstanding the discouraging reference made to them by Mr. Holmes in his pamphlet. For the social work which these schools were doing, and had done, made them of special interest to me. It seemed, too, that it would be useful to see how far these schools, with which Dr. Montessori had had nothing to do for the last three years, differed from the schools with which she was still connected. It would be, of course, impossible for any schools we start in England to

have the inspiration of Dr. Montessori's presence. It seemed to me, therefore, that there was much to be learnt from these independent schools in Rome.

Dr. Montessori's secretary very kindly wrote down for me a list of those which they recommended: these were, of course, the one in the Via Marsi, where Dr. Montessori's work with the little slum children began, the school in the Via Campani, also in the San Lorenzo district, and the one in Via Famagosta, in the district west of St. Peter's, known as the Prati di Castello. These are the three Case dei Bambini described and referred to in Dr. Montessori's book, and I must confess that I should have been very sorry to leave Rome without seeing them. They also gave me the address of the 'Beni Stabili' Society, of which Signor Edoardo Talamo, whose name has been made familiar to all the readers of Dr. Montessori's book, is the managing director. On applying at this address, I received cards of admission to these three schools. I said that I was a teacher, and that I should endeavour not to be in any way a nuisance to the directrices.

I went first, of course, to the Casa in the Via Marsi in the San Lorenzo district. I took my lunch with me from the hotel, for perusal of my card of admission had convinced me that were I to come away for lunch, I could not apply for admission in the afternoon. After having spent whole days in the

Case dei Bambini in Milan, I was desirous of being present throughout the whole day here. Things turned out very well. For between eleven and twelve such heavy rain came on that it seemed quite providential that I had not to go out into it.

The San Lorenzo district adjoins the railway line that leads to Tivoli. It lies just beyond the broad Via Porta Lorenzo, along which a tram runs from the station at Rome. Its streets are narrow, and the windows of many of the tall houses are adorned with washing hung out to dry. There are many people sitting on the doorsteps of the houses, and there are on the outskirts small cheap shops. The Beni Stabili Society only owns part of the property in the district. I found the Via Marsi, and I found a Casa dei Bambini. The children came to greet me with outstretched hands, but the directrice, a little fair woman, made inquiries about my permit. I showed my ticket. It was signed by Edoardo Talamo. She pointed to the copy of regulations which hung near the door, and it was signed by some one with a different name. We concluded that I had come to the wrong place, and she kindly offered to conduct me to the right one. I tried to find out afterwards to whom this little school with the friendly babies belonged. My glance at their regulations had been too cursory. Lost opportunities of gaining information do not recur.

The directrice of the right Casa dei Bambini, Via Marsi 58, was neither small nor fair, but a dark, tall, big Italian. I naturally looked at her with interest, for she had been a co-worker with Dr. Montessori in this school, and is mentioned by name in Dr. Montessori's book. She showed me with pride during the course of our midday talk the copy of Dr. Montessori's work which had been presented to her by the authoress and inscribed with an appreciative reference to her good service.

The flats, which, as Dr. Montessori has described in her book, were the result of reconstructing a derelict property into which a criminal population had drifted, were built round a courtyard—not such a spacious courtyard as those in Milan, but one sufficiently large to give light and air and beauty. One entered under an archway. A wide walk went round the courtyard, and in the centre bounded by a low green paling was a garden in which were little paths between grass and tall palms. The green of the palms against the white walls of the tenements produced a very striking effect. One turned to the right towards the Casa dei Bambini. The name was over the door. One entered and found oneself in a passage from which stairs led to the higher stories. A door on the right led into the antechamber in which the children on leaving hung the pinafores worn in school. The offices and lavatory led from this antechamber,

and another door opened into the working-room. This latter had been constructed by throwing two rooms into one. There were pillars down the centre of the room and windows on both sides. Those on the right as one entered, looked into the courtyard with the palms, the others overlooked a smaller grassy courtyard without paths, which was made use of by the children of another Casa dei Bambini occupying rooms on the other side of this courtyard. The windows of the one could not have been more than thirty to forty feet from the windows of the other. But they in no way interfered with one another and were quite independent.

The Beni Stabili Society is not a philanthropic society, but a commercial undertaking whose shares are quoted in the stock market. The Casa dei Bambini was started with the object of preserving the property from the injuries done by the children below school age and of raising the standard of living of the inhabitants through the work done for the bambini. The children have not, like the children in Milan, two working-rooms, and their one working-room is not so large as the ones in Milan. The tables accommodate three children, and they were arranged on either side of an aisle, facing the end at which the directrice's table and the blackboard were placed. There was room to pass beneath the windows, so that the children had access to the cupboard containing the Montessori

material, which was in the corner near the directrice's table. Except for one table against the wall at the back of the room, the tables did not extend beyond the pillars. That part of the room was kept free, and the children were playing there when I arrived. There were thirty-eight children present. Their ages were three, four, five, and six. At a quarter to ten they left off playing and went to their places at the tables and stood in front of their little chairs. After the singing of a hymn the directrice put them through the positions, prima, secunda, tertia, so familiar in the ordinary school, but never heard of in the Case dei Bambini in Milan, and gave them arm exercises and breathing exercises. Then they practised sitting down quietly without making any noise by scraping on the floor with their little chairs.

In addition to the directrice there was a young and good-looking attendant, but one perceived almost at once that she had little idea of the ideal at the base of Dr. Montessori's work. If she loved the children, she was successful in concealing it. She gave one the impression of fierceness. Of course it accorded very ill with her appearance. The pose of a Madonna would have suited her better as far as looks were concerned, but I think she would have been happier could she have had a stick like the young mistress I saw in a school at Tremezzo, and have gone as she did round the class slashing on the desks

with it. She was the equivalent of the cleaner in the Milan Case, and a good part of the time she was looking after the children in the lavatory.

This attendant took the material out of the cupboard and passed it round. The directrice told the children not to talk while it was being given out. The children, however, had some choice as to what they took. They shared between them the various frames, the solid and plane insets, the broad stair, the long stair, and some of the sand-paper letters.

Already, of course, the differences between this and the Milan Case dei Bambini were more striking than the similarities. I was sitting facing the children near to the cupboard where the material was kept. The bigger children sat near the front, the little ones at the back. The directrice took the long stair to the little boy of six, who was the show child of the Casa. He had a pale face and large grey eyes with dark rings under them. He went through a number of exercises, showing considerable arithmetical ability with the long stair. It was evident that its use was better understood here than it had been in Milan.

At five minutes to ten slates were given out to those children who wanted them. These were those who had been occupied with the sand-paper letters. The slates had lines drawn on them wide apart so that the characters which the children wrote on them in chalk were as large as the script sand-paper letters.

There was not, of course, room for more than one word.

At twenty past ten the children sang, quite nicely. Then one little girl, a child of five sitting in the front row, went to the blackboard and wrote that they were very pleased to have a visitor. The sentence was still on the board in clear excellent writing when two of Dr. Montessori's American students arrived and were accommodated with chairs opposite the middle aisle. The little girl hastened to the blackboard and altered the sentence so as to make it include the two new visitors.

The directrice again showed off what the best boy could do with the long stair. It seemed to me that her voice, always powerful, was more so when these visitors were there. One of the little girls then drilled four boys, then twelve of the children after running out very quietly in pairs made a circle and sang. The ladies departed. They had been there a little under an hour.

After they had gone the material was all put away and the directrice went through the silence game, which was well done. It was by this time half-past eleven and the time usually spent out of doors had passed. The rain, which lasted for several hours, had begun and there was no going out that morning. They played in the clear space beyond the pillars until twelve o'clock. I was much interested in seeing

that the pale-faced boy, notwithstanding his being the show boy, entered into the various round games which they played with as much spirit as any of them. The games were not equally well known or equally well done by all. It was interesting to see the process of learning by imitation going on and to watch the pleasure of the children when some child did much better than he or she had done before.

At twelve o'clock, when all the blue pinafores had been taken off and hung up in the antechamber and when the children had shaken hands, they went off to their respective homes round the courtyard. Their mothers came for some of them on account of the heavy rain. The youngest of all, a quaint little three-year-old with her hair so tied that part of it stuck straight up on the top of her head like a brush, had simply to mount the staircase which went up from the vestibule.

The directrice and I sat down to our lunch at her table, and in our quiet conversation we made advance in mutual acquaintance. One of the mothers came in with a bunch of flowers, which the directrice showed me. This poor mother had brought them to her for her mother's grave. The woman had remembered that the morrow was the second anniversary of the death of the directrice's mother. This was only one of the signs which I observed of the love and respect which the mothers of the children felt for her.

She no longer lived in one of the flats as Dr. Montessori tells us that she had at first, but it was evident that she was in close touch with the homes.

Even before one o'clock some of the children returned. The door was always open during the day to the bambini. Three little girls took possession of the one blackboard. Two drew on the front and one behind. They wrote the names of what they drew underneath. The others played quietly in the clear space.

There was one boy who was a good deal older than the rest. Although he sat among the six-year-olds, yet he could not do what they did. He was paralysed down one side and could not learn well. He was very happy among the children, happier far than he would have been at the municipal school. The directrice took great interest in him. I questioned her about his future. She thought he would be a newspaper-seller.

A few elder children who had formerly been bambini came in in the afternoon. They wore overalls, and the two or three stripes on the sleeve showed the grade in which they were in the municipal school. They took their places among the others for the drawing, which occupied the first three-quarters of an hour. On this occasion one or two of the children had out the expensive nature-study books to which I referred in the first chapter. The show boy was

colouring the picture with the bat. The books had Italian text. In consequence of my asking whether the children could read the print, the directrice asked the pale-faced boy to read a little. He read about half a page, very fast and correctly, though not with much expression. He had made the transition from script to print for himself.

The rain continued, so all thought of the garden had to be abandoned. For the rest of the afternoon, that is for more than two hours, until five o'clock, they played in the clear space beyond the pillars. The elder children from the municipal school were the leaders, and the games, mostly singing games, proceeded with wonderful spirit and good temper. The directrice had not to intervene. It was real play, natural and graceful. Again I had the opportunity of seeing the pride which the elder children took in what the little ones could do. The little girl with the brush-like hair was particularly engaging in the attention with which she imitated the actions of the others and tried to master the words of the songs.

There was no meal here in the afternoon as in Milan. The children were too poor. They could not have brought well-filled baskets such as the Milan children brought. When their overalls were taken off, one saw how poor their clothing was. Yet there was not one of the children who was not clean, and when

they had on the overalls, no one would have suspected their poverty. The directrice had devised many exercises for teaching them good manners. Her chief object was to civilize them, and in this she succeeded. I found them as charming and interesting as the Milan children. They certainly had less liberty. The garden was not quite near to the working-room, and the little ones could not run into it while the elder ones worked. The youngest sat at the back tables, and when they were tired of working with the material they just sat still and watched the others. This seemed to interest them greatly. They were quite comfortable in their little chairs. If they got down on to the floor no one objected, and they could go out to the lavatory, where the assistant was, without asking.

As the weather had not made it possible for me to see the garden, the making of which is described in Dr. Montessori's book, I applied for another ticket for the same Casa, and as on the first occasion I took my lunch.

The children were having free play as before when I arrived. Thirty children were present. More came in later. The full number of children in attendance was between forty and fifty. They had a skipping-rope and they were amusing themselves with this near the far windows. When the directrice called them to the tables, I noticed that as far as I could

remember they went to the same places as on my previous visit. They took their seats. Then the directrice called up a little boy, who stood before her at the top of the middle aisle while she asked him questions about what he had done the day before and that morning before he came to school. He answered these questions clearly and audibly. I could understand all he said, as well as what two other little boys said who came up afterwards. These three little boys were not from the front rows where sat the children who could write, but from the back. They had not yet begun to write. Power to articulate clearly and ability to express oneself clearly in words is in Dr. Montessori's view a necessary preparation for writing.

At 9.35, after more children had come in, they said a prayer standing and sang a hymn. Then they did arm drill as on my first visit. At a quarter to ten the directrice got out slates and writing-books, and one of the boys put round the inkpots. She gave the solid insets to the three youngest, who sat at the table farthest from her, and they began to work at them contentedly. Then she got out the broad stair and gave it to a little boy, also sitting in the back row, and gave the plane insets to a little girl sitting farther forward. Meanwhile the children in the middle of the right-hand side of the room had out some of the sand-paper letters, the consonants *p*, *d*, *t*, and *m*,

and were going round these with their fingers. At five minutes to ten she wrote the words 'pomo', 'dito', and 'fumo' on the blackboard and the children who had the sand-paper letters wrote these words on their lined slates in chalk, in a large hand kept even by the lines. The more industrious children wrote the words several times and showed themselves very critical about the letters. There was one boy, however, who was satisfied when he had written the words once or twice, and he then used his slate for drawing. This proceeding was, of course, quite different from anything I had seen in Milan. There the children had built words with the pink and blue letters under the supervision of the directrice, but their writing had been spontaneous. In Milan it never happened that so many children were writing at once.

Here, in addition to this middle group who were writing these words as often as they pleased, there were two groups in the front, the children provided with inkpots, who were doing dictation. The sentences written by the five-year-olds were easier than those done by the group of which the show boy formed one. The two groups were kept going without fuss or difficulty. The directrice articulated all the words very clearly, helping the children to break them up into syllables. This of course secured correct spelling. Even while she was doing this, the directrice did not lose sight of the children at the back. She

encouraged them to change their material with one another when they wanted to.

By twenty-five minutes past ten the dictation was finished and the books and inkpots were put away. That the children were not tired of writing was shown by the fact that two of the girls went to the blackboard and wrote. At half-past ten they all stood up in their places, the little ones got into pairs, and they went round the courtyard on their way to the garden. The garden door had to be unlocked, for this strip of garden, which lies between the tenements and a road, is kept for the children. Of course the garden would be of far greater use had it been situated in regard to the working-room as were the gardens in Milan. It was in two parts, divided by steps. There was a wide path down the middle, covered with loose grey pebbles, like those of the Milan gardens, and there were beds on both sides. There were some trees, some rose-bushes, and many privet bushes. These last may account for the infertility of the soil. The directrice said the soil wanted manuring. The children did not seem to have garden plots of their own, and I saw no gardening tools. There was some paper and orange-peel on the beds, but not much, and there was some sign that the children ran on the beds. A great deal could have been made of the garden had the directrice or the assistant been as keen about it as were those of the Via Solari.

Still, although so much more might have been made of it, even as it was it was a valuable possession. The wind blew among the rose-bushes, the privet showed white flowers among its green, and the gravel space was big enough for games. After a quarter of an hour's play they returned to the working-room.

The directrice gave the frames to the elder children who sat in front. They set to work on them, but it was evident that they had no difficulty in doing them, and they soon returned to their slates, on which they drew or made figures. The directrice put out the long stair and a box of colour tablets, which some of the children used. The little girl of five who sat in the front, and whose writing was very excellent and deftness of hand touchingly beautiful, continued writing and drawing on the blackboard. Her writing on the board was as good as any grown-up person's could be. By and by she was joined at the board by another child, also a girl, and both continued to draw and write on it. One felt what a pity it was that there were not more blackboards, one saw how much they were needed.

It was five minutes past eleven when a man came from the office. While he was talking to the directrice, one of the boys in the front row came out and stood in front of his table. He was of course doing no harm, and I doubt whether the directrice would have troubled about him. It was the man from the office

who told him to go back to his seat. This man was part of the outside influence that tended to upset Dr. Montessori's reform in favour of mobility. I saw the same thing in another of these schools. There it was the porter, who came in for the number in attendance, who told a boy to keep in his place. When one reflects on the strength of this outside influence and the deep-rooted tendency to identify immobility with goodness, one is surprised that there is as much freedom remaining in these Case dei Bambini as does remain.

The girls in the front continued to draw. They did not show much originality, though I thought it interesting that little girls of five in a Roman slum should draw dirigibles. Once they had coloured an outline representing violets. This they kept on reproducing. Probably if the directrice had set them to draw a privet twig from the natural object they would have succeeded. But she did not seem to recognize their need. They drew round their hands for lack of some other object, but of this the directrice did not approve. She did not use the opportunity as I saw a teacher in Signorina Galli-Saccenti's school use it to improve the children's observation of their hands. Perhaps it was that she had not time just then, for six children formed a group round her while she used the long stair for number-work—exercises in soldi and centesimi.

At twenty-nine minutes past eleven they began to

sing through the multiplication table. The leaders were, of course, in front. The little ones at the back went on playing with the material. The number of children who took part in the chorus varied. For nine times the chorus was feeble, while for ten times it swelled to quite a good volume.

This only lasted six minutes. Then the pale-faced boy came to the board and multiplied 8006 by 4 and divided the product by 8. The younger ones watched, and the effect of this was that their interest was diverted to number. Several of them began practising writing numbers on their slates. One child of five quite spontaneously wrote up to 100. All this, however, only lasted ten minutes. Then all the material and other things were put away, and for a few minutes the directrice conversed with them on points connected with the room. They counted the walls, windows, and corners. Of course only some attended. Then they had a prayer and hymn. They went out and took off their overalls. Some of the boys could unfasten the buttons behind, and the children helped the little ones who had not yet mastered the buttoning. They shook hands as before.

Again I had lunch with the directrice. It was evident to me by this time that this was a type of school quite different from the Case dei Bambini in Milan, and I was rather anxious to ascertain how far the directrice counted herself Montessorian. I

asked her, therefore, if she knew the Froebelian material, and on hearing that she did, I asked further whether she preferred the Montessori material. She answered at once that she infinitely preferred it, and gave as her reason that it does not require that minute and constant directions be given to the children. She was thus in full sympathy with a very enlarged amount of freedom, and the children in her care showed no sign of repression. They had not, however, that complete freedom to come in and go out enjoyed by the Milan children, and just because they could not have this owing to the conditions under which they worked, it was incumbent on her to supervise between forty and fifty children at once. It is of course held strictly by Dr. Montessori that the material should be used only for the purpose for which it is intended, and to secure this constitutes one of the difficulties. The directrice spoke of the constant tendency of the children to build with the broad stair and with the colour tablets, a tendency which can actually only be counteracted by providing other building material. This had not been done here. Then she spoke of the danger there is of the children tracing the sand-paper letters the wrong way; often, if left to themselves, they will hold them upside down. There is the danger, too, of putting the wrong numbers on the various number material. Her endeavour had been to minimize these dangers and to prevent by

vigilance the misuse of the material. Of the children themselves, of their intelligence, and of their desire to learn she spoke with enthusiasm. She had no need to drive. It was sufficient to give them the opportunity.

After all these were little Italian children who had to be fitted to take their place in the existing educational system. In some way the ambition had grown up in these schools that the children on going into the municipal school should pass at once into the second or third grade. We cannot understand why some things, such as the saying of the multiplication table, were done, and others which we think desirable, for example the gardening, were left undone unless we remember this. The existence of such an ambition accounts for some of the differences between this type of school and that in Milan. In one point they were similar. No use was made of emulation in promoting progress. The power of self-criticism was wonderfully developed in some of these San Lorenzo children. There was keenness in their intellectual atmosphere.

The fine weather made the return to school a little less early than it had been on the last occasion. As before, some of the children went direct to the blackboard and began to write and draw. Again the elder children from the municipal school came in.

Perhaps our conversation led the directrice to try some of the games which Dr. Montessori devised for

the training of the senses, some of which I had seen in Milan. She began with sound direction. A child was blindfolded and had to point in the direction whence the sound made by the directrice seemed to come as she moved quietly round the child, whistling now to the left, now to the right of the child, or now directly overhead. A number of children asked for a turn, but politely, and the others watched with interest. This interest became breathless when the directrice invited the tufted three-year-old from the back row to try. Her mistakes, which were more numerous than those of the older children, were not pointed out in accordance with the Montessorian principle that encouragement is the main thing, and the other children gave her a hearty clap as she went proudly back to her seat. At five minutes to three another game was started. A two-lira piece, a one-lira piece, a twenty centesimi or moneta, a ten centesimi or due soldi, and a five centesimi or soldo were thrown up so as to fall on the stone floor. A blindfolded child had to say from the sound which each was. The children were eager to be allowed to try. The directrice then used Dr. Montessori's eight boxes containing small pebbles, sand, &c., and asked the children which of a pair was the louder. Perhaps they had had enough sound exercise, for two of the children in the back row, one of them the tufted baby, went to sleep with their heads on the desk.

When asked at ten minutes past three whether they preferred to draw or go into the garden, they were unanimous in favour of the latter.

At first in the garden they went through their favourite singing games. Then they had free play. The directrice, the assistant, and I stood and watched them. The garden had no benches. Sometimes when the material was carried into the garden and the whole morning or afternoon was spent there, the chairs were carried out. On this occasion it was not thought worth while. This was the result of the distance of the garden from the working-room. In Milan no one ever stood for so long. It was no wonder the directrice told me that she was tired when five o'clock came. As for the children, they were not standing. The boys lay on the pebbles as they dug them with their hands and gathered them into heaps and mounds. The girls also lay down, and a group of them, gathered round their leader from the municipal school, cleared a space of pebbles and then wrote their names and other words on this space in pebbles. We of course made no comment.

Then just before five o'clock they went in and took off their pinafores. Between the garden and the Casa the children passed the washhouse, where many of the mothers were at work, and I could see these women looking out with smiling pride as the little procession of bambini passed.

In the two days that I was there not a tear was shed except by one little girl with a badly broken-out face, who was brought in by her mother on the first afternoon. She had evidently been fretful all day, and the directrice wanted to keep her a little so as to give the mother a rest. It was touching to see the kindness and wisdom with which the directrice treated this unattractive little charge.

Many heads appeared at the windows above the garden when the children were there. To see childhood in its beautiful innocence at play in the garden must indeed be good for the older people of San Lorenzo, whose childhood spent in its unregenerate days had stored none of the happy memories that these more fortunate babes were storing. How much they owed, these young things, to the beneficent thought of Signor Edoardo Talamo and to the lady who had helped him realize his thought!

It was with real regret that I went through the last handshaking, knowing it to be the last, watched the little tufted baby climb the stone staircase with the roll left from my lunch in her brown little fist, and said good-bye to the large-hearted woman who, whether she was truly Montessorian or not, was doing for these children a noble work.

In spirit certainly she was Montessorian, and not even a succession of unsuitable assistants could change that. But she was too big a woman, and the room

was not big enough for her to cease to attract the visitor's attention. The floor of the room was of stone, and without a supply of mats or rugs, which seemed lacking, the children could not work on the floor as they did in many of the other Case, and as is undoubtedly good for them. I looked through a portfolio of drawings and saw how formerly the directrice had prepared outlined drawings for the children to colour, just as the directrices in Milan did. She was, in fact, gifted as an artist, but I rather fancy that she did less of this than she had done. With her present assistant the duties of supervision were heavy, and although visitors still continued to come, yet probably she missed the appreciation which would have helped her to keep the work on the broad lines on which it had been planned, or even to develop it on still broader lines. Had I gone into the school only for an hour, just long enough to see the show boy display his really good arithmetic and two or three other things, I could have formed no just estimate of the work being done there. As it was I recognized it as a valuable type of school, without much of what Dr. Montessori's book had led us to expect of a Montessori school, unlike the Case dei Bambini in Milan, and yet having an excellence of its own.

CHAPTER V

VIA CAMPANI

READERS of Dr. Montessori's book will remember that a second Casa dei Bambini was opened in the San Lorenzo district in the same year as the first one. This was in the Via Campani, a narrow street adjoining the Via Marsi, and to-day of an even slummier appearance. It was the kind of street one would avoid. Numbers of idle people were hanging about, and when I came to the tenements, which were on the left-hand side, I was not cheered by the sight of a beautiful courtyard with graceful palms. For though there was a courtyard which let in light and air to the flats, yet it was in a rough and dirty state. The ground floor seemed mainly utilized for the storage of carts and handcarts, and when one ascended the staircase which led to the Casa dei Bambini on the first floor and stood on the balcony which ran round overlooking the courtyard, one could watch the handcarts and carts going in and out and guess at the occupations which engaged the inhabitants. From the balcony a straight staircase ran up to the flat-roof playground used by the children. I looked at this with considerable interest, for it was on this spot that the first explosion into writing described by Dr. Montessori in her book took place.

This Casa had one working-room, made by throwing two rooms into one. It was certainly not of a shape one would choose. It was long and narrow, and only just accommodated two rows of tables with a central aisle between. The second room, which had been thrown into this one, was at the far end and was wider. Tables were arranged round this room, and these were occupied by the youngest children, who worked at the easier frames under the supervision of the assistant. This assistant, like the one in the Via Marsi, was a little too fond of doing things for the children instead of waiting while they did them for themselves. At the door end of the long room was the directrice's table, a blackboard, and the cupboard containing the material.

They were all busy at work when I arrived at twenty minutes to ten, the babes in the far room, the rest seated three at each table, facing the directrice. On the blackboard were written a number of simple questions, and these were being answered on her slate by a little girl who sat in front. She showed what she had written to the directrice and afterwards wrote the whole into an exercise book. This was the most advanced pupil, for she composed the answers to the questions independently after having read the questions. The four next advanced presently came up to the front, arranged themselves in a group, and wrote dictation.

There were forty-seven children in this Casa. When I came in three were writing on slates, one was using the tower, and another had the long stair. A good many of the children were tracing the sand-paper letters, which here were fixed not on to cardboard but on to thin pieces of wood.

They could take out and replace the material themselves, and the middle group of children who had been busy with the sand-paper letters presently got out the more difficult frames which the little ones were not using, the lacing frame and the frame with bows.

It was interesting to watch them at work. They showed remarkable power of self-criticism. The little girl with the bows undid the second bow repeatedly as though she could not satisfy herself. Similarly when the children were writing on the slates, they rubbed out a letter several times before the shape was perfect enough to please them. Excellence rather than quantity seemed the motive of their action. They differed, however, in regard to this thoroughness. The little boy who sat next to the little girl with the bows took out the lacing frame. His first task was, of course, to unlace, but instead of unlacing the whole, he undid only about a third. He then proceeded to lace this up. Next he went on to do what lazy people so often do, to annoy the industrious people around him. In this case the

little girl with the bows was the victim, and he thought it good fun to undo the bows as soon as she did them. This went on for a long time, but she did not run to the directrice for protection. What she did was to cover the frame with her arms as soon as a bow was done so as to protect it from her troublesome neighbour. In this way she slowly, with the most admirable patience and good temper, succeeded in doing them all. Then she carried the frame off to the cupboard in triumph. I do not know whether the directrice had observed all this. If she had, she had not interfered. The children learn to defend themselves.

Among the things which the children had out was a picture-book, a very excellent one, containing pictures of animals, and in this case the names were in Italian. They were also using the plane insets, and along with them they had the blue paper figures on cardboard and the outlines of the figures. They had out only a few of these, and they seemed to interest them far more than they had the little girl in the Via Solari when she had out the whole set.

Several of the elder children did sums in exercise books, but at twenty-five minutes past eleven all went out on to the balcony for a few minutes' play. They soon came back and took off their overalls. Why they took them off in such good time I did not know. As I then discovered, they were not returning in the

afternoon. It was a public holiday, one of the very many. After the overalls had been taken off, the directrice did the silence game, but she did not succeed in getting the absolute silence which Dr. Montessori describes. They then trooped into the end room, which was easily cleared, and here they sang the same kind of games as the children had in the Via Marsi. Their singing was very pleasing.

After they had returned to their places, they said a prayer and sang a hymn. They then shook hands and went home. Perhaps it was on account of the holiday that they had had so little play in the open air. One of the afternoons I was in San Lorenzo I saw them playing very happily in their roof-playground, and I believe that they still grew plants in pots up there. What the drawing done in this Casa was like, I had no opportunity of seeing. None of the children did any colouring the morning I was there. The practice varies: in some Case it can be done when the children choose, morning or afternoon; in some it is reserved for the afternoon.

I do not fancy, though am not quite sure, that this was the same directrice who was there when Dr. Montessori worked there. They had seemed surprised at the Beni Stabili Office when I asked for a card of admission for this Casa. It certainly had not the advantages of the newer Case. Nevertheless, there was spontaneity about the children's

work, and with so many scholars, the children could not have made the advance they had unless it had been their own desire to advance. They seemed to me very orderly. The little boy with the lacing frame had made clear that they were not all saints by nature. But the little girl must have had a much greater feeling of triumph in tying her bows unaided than if she had appealed to the protection of the directrice. In witnessing her pleasure, the result of her patience and good temper, surely the little boy must have learnt something of the value of self-control.

CHAPTER VI

VIA FAMAGOSTA

VERY different was the environment of the Via Famagosta Casa from that of the Casa in the Via Campani. While the latter was actually in a slum, the former was in the midst of a courtyard as wide and pleasant as either of the courtyards in Milan. In some ways it was even more advantageously situated than those in Milan, for it lay on the edge of the country and a hill sloped up from the road at the back of the Casa. The windows of the working-room looked out on one side into a pleasant courtyard, on the other over a rural landscape. The flats were inhabited by very different people from the poor occupants of the

Via Campani tenements, 'middle class' Dr. Montessori called them in her book.

Next to the Casa dei Bambini was the library, open to the inhabitants of the flats—a large airy room, not overstocked with books, but containing comfortable chairs and a large solid table on which were spread out magazines and papers. Both the library and the Casa dei Bambini opened directly into the courtyard, which was adorned with palms in large luxuriant beds surrounded by broad paths with the ubiquitous grey pebbles. The children had no playground of their own, but used these broad paths; and in the afternoon when the sun shone hot on the courtyard, they found shade in the broad passage which led to the gates opening on to the back road, through whose bars they could see the fields sloping up the hill. One drawback, of course, of having no railed-in part of their own was that they were not allowed to run in and out at will like the children at Milan. But all the Beni Stabili Case made a sharper division between work and play than was made at Milan, where work and play went on simultaneously.

The number of children in attendance was forty-seven, the same as that at the Casa in the Via Campani, but only thirty children were there when I arrived on the day of my first visit. The length of the room from the door which opened from the courtyard was eleven metres. From the wall behind the directrice's

table to the opposite wall it was six metres. The tables here were smaller than those in San Lorenzo and accommodated only two children. They faced the directrice's table. To the left of this table towards the door was the cupboard containing the material, and beyond that pegs for the children's hats and pinafores; to the right was the one blackboard and the door which led into the tiny lavatory in which there was only one water-closet. In this respect this Casa was worse supplied than the Via Marsi Casa. These conditions limited the freedom of the children, and when they wanted to go to the lavatory, they stretched out their first and second fingers and waited for permission.

The directrice and assistant had both been there when Dr. Montessori worked there. Even some of the children remembered her and spoke about her. The directrice was a dark, slight, good-looking woman with a very quiet manner. She was married and did not live in the flats. The assistant was the wife of the porter, who lived in the porter's house. She was a middle-aged, motherly body, quiet in her ways, very fond of the children, and with considerable understanding of the ideal underlying the method. One realized all the more when in the Casa in the Via Famagosta how unfortunate it was for the Via Marsi Casa that the assistant had not assimilated the spirit of the method.

The children hung up their hats as they came in and put on their overalls. The directrice then called the names of the children. Every day the number of children in attendance had to be sent to the Beni Stabili Office. She then went round among the children, looked at their hands, and, lightly turning their heads from side to side, inspected their ears. The children then got their material out of the cupboard, and they did this in a perfectly orderly way. Five of the children chose picture-books, three simply to look at the pictures, the other two to read. The text was in print, but they had made the transition from script to print and could read to amuse themselves. Most of the material came out, the solid insets, of which the younger children do not easily tire, the long stair, the broad stair, the pink tower, the boxes of colour tablets, and the various frames for buttoning, tying, and lacing.

I sat facing the children, between the blackboard and the directrice's table. Opposite to me was a three-year old boy, very fair, and with blue eyes. He tried for a long time to do the buttoning frame, but he could not manage it, and after a time the directrice took it from him and gave him instead the frame with patent fasteners. He succeeded in doing this, then immediately undid it and did it once more. After that he rested quite quietly.

Near to him a child did the tower several times,

then made a staircase with it. Two children at the same table used the broad stair; they knew how to arrange the pieces, and when they had done this, they amused themselves taking it in turn to hide the thinnest piece between the others. So quiet were they over this that they did not attract the directrice's attention. Otherwise probably their amusement would have been cut short.

The little boy who, instead of buttoning, put his head through the buttoning frame did not escape detection, and the directrice promptly came and took away the frame.

Several of the children were tracing the sand-paper letters, and presently a little girl of four and a half mounted to the blackboard and wrote, in a most excellent hand, 'io vengo a scuola volentieri perchè imparo tante belle cose.' After that several other children came in turn to the board and wrote. Here again there was need of more blackboards.

After the fair little boy had rested, the directrice gave him the cylinder, cone, and sphere. He took each into his hands and felt it and he repeated after her the names, articulating the words with care. Then she asked him to pick them out, and this he did correctly. Then according to the plan which Dr. Montessori adopted from Séguin for these short individual lessons it remained for him to give the names. The directrice presented the cone. He took

it into his hands and felt it carefully. Then he gave the correct name. With the cylinder and the sphere he gave the names without the preliminary handling. The directrice then went round among the children showing the three solids and asking the names. They seemed familiar to all the children.

The elder children here evidently assisted the directrice with the little ones. A very young child was tracing a *d* in the sand-paper letters. He was prevented from going round it the wrong way by an elder child next to him, who showed him how to hold the letter, where to begin, and how to go round.

On the directrice's table were a number of exercise books, which she gave me to look at, containing writing, dictation or free composition, and sums, but I saw no dictation actually done that morning. At eleven they put away all the material. Going to the back of the room after silencing the children for the silence game, the directrice called ten of the children by name. Then they all went out into the courtyard and were playing on the grey pebbles when they caught sight of Signor Talamo, who was bringing a lady visitor to see the buildings. Recognizing him, they ran towards him with outstretched hands and thronged round him joyfully. It was a sight I was glad to have seen.

The hours of attendance in the Beni Stabili Case are left to the discretion of the directrice. Here,

instead of 1.30 as in the Via Marsi, the time for the afternoon work was two. But the children were back long before that. The door of the Casa was open, and the assistant, who knew the ways of the children, was in readiness. They began to come back at one o'clock. They went to their chairs and sat quietly, for she discouraged them from moving about. They did not take out any of the material, not even when two o'clock came and the directrice had not returned. They had an extra long rest that day, for the directrice had been delayed and it was half-past two before she came. That the assistant did exercise a restraining influence on them I gathered from the fact that when she absented herself from the room for some minutes, the sound of voices increased and there was some movement. On her return, however, they resumed their seats and rest.

As soon as the directrice came in, she and the assistant carried round the metal insets, and the coloured pencils and the sheets of paper. The children chose their own inset and pencil and were soon busy colouring their outlined figure. As at the Via Marsi children from the municipal school had come in, so here. They sat at the tables at the back and had brought with them home lessons to do. What they did, appeared to interest the younger children. When these lessons had been disposed of, these boys fetched paper, pencils, and insets, and set about

making and colouring elaborate designs, the sight of which must have stirred the ambition of the younger ones.

They worked steadily for three-quarters of an hour, when all but the boys from the municipal school put away their paper. Again they played the silence game. This time only seven children were called as they sat waiting with their little faces covered with their hands. Then they practised rising from their chairs without making a noise with the chair on the floor, and they practised walking quietly about the room in and out among the tables. At half-past three they took off their pinafores, and spent the rest of the afternoon in the courtyard. Sometimes the little ones went out earlier than this with the assistant, leaving the elder children inside to do dictation and sums. Here again they were ambitious that the children should pass at least into the second grade. As the children could stay in the Casa until they were seven and the first grade of the municipal school started with children of six, unless they had done the equivalent of the first grade work in the Casa, they would actually have been behind what was expected for their age. It was in every way a gain to the children that they could stay. The presence of the elder children, too, was of great value to the little ones, and made the whole conduct of the Casa an easier matter than it would otherwise have been.

Conversation with the assistant taught me that they regarded this individual teaching as far more difficult than the mechanical collective teaching of the common schools, but neither directrice nor assistant had any doubt as to its value. I certainly had not.

CHAPTER VII

VIA GIORDANO BRUNO

The Casa in the Via Giordano Bruno was the newest of all the Beni Stabili Case, and Dr. Montessori had never worked there. The justifiable pride which Signor Talamo felt in it led to my receiving an admission card for it. The block of flats lay in the same district as the Via Famagosta, and like the flats there was on the edge of the country. Undoubtedly this new block of flats was very beautiful. As one went in by the porter's lodge, one saw the Casa dei Bambini opposite. It was on the lowest floor of a middle block of dwellings which stood on an eminence. A broad terrace surrounded by garden beds was in front, and this was approached from the main courtyard on either side by wide sloping paths with shallow steps. Roses hung in profusion round the windows of the Casa. It was the most striking feature in the courtyard, and this seemed to symbolize the increasing

importance which they had come to attach to the welfare of the little children.

On entering from the terrace by the door towards the left of the building, one came into an entrance hall. Behind this was a moderately large room for play in bad weather. The door to the right led into the large working-room, which was both wider and longer than the room in the Via Famagosta. The directrice's table and the blackboard were facing the windows, and the children's tables, each accommodating two, were arranged in flat horseshoes. In one row there were as many as nine tables. There were fifty-three children present. The lavatory led out of the working-room at the far end, and was a great improvement on that in the Via Famagosta.

The directrice was a big, good-looking, dark-haired, rosy-cheeked woman, married, with a little baby six months old. She had received some training at the Via Famagosta. The assistant was a young girl of not very sympathetic manner, who had no real idea of the ideal at which they were aiming.

Proceedings started at 9.40 by an examination by the directrice of the children's hands and ears. The children stood up to be examined, and out of the fifty-three only two had to be sent off to wash. The directrice then gave them some practice in rising from their chairs quietly without making a noise on the floor. Then, like the directrice at the Via Marsi, she gave

them some arm exercises. Many of the little ones did not know which was their right and which their left arm. They then moved about the room between the tables on tiptoe, so as to learn to move quietly without upsetting things. Then facing the picture of the Madonna della Sedia, which was at one end of the room, they sang a prayer.

Here the children, as is so much the best, got out the material they wanted. Of course the three solid insets came out, the long and broad stair, the boxes of colour tablets, the various frames, and the sand-paper letters. Any one who has tried to watch fifty-three children all differently occupied will know how difficult it is, especially when the children are seen for the first time. It is almost impossible to be systematic in one's observations. Sometimes one is attracted by the small size of the children. I was struck, for example, by the smallness of the boy who was succeeding in buttoning on the buttoning frame with a button-hook, and again by the unusually small size, presumably connoting youth, of the little boy who was able to tie bows perfectly. This last little boy soon put away the frame and brought out the sand-paper letters *f* and *o*.

Some of the children varied the exercise with the solid insets by arranging the cylinders in order of height outside the stand.

Of course I saw the tendency to use both the long

and broad stair in ways that were not intended. The child with the long stair was using the pieces for making a house. The way to deal with this situation, if the child is old enough and willing, is to show him some of the really interesting number-work which can be done by means of the long stair. Otherwise he should be able to get out building material. The broad stair also proved a snare. The child who took it could arrange it so easily that he soon began to play.

Among the children there were two with reading-books who were reading to themselves in a low tone. The titles of these books were *Amore et Luce* and *Vittorio Nugoli*. They were of course in print, so that these children had made the transition from script to print characters. By ten minutes past ten many of the children had fetched slates in order to draw or write on them. This they did with ordinary white chalk, and they had circular rolls of strips of felt for cleaning them. Of course one saw no uncleanly ways of cleaning the slates.

About this time some of the children placed two tables together by the window near the door, put round chairs and writing-books, and when the directrice joined them, five of them wrote dictation in pencil. The dictation was given very slowly, for the directrice had to keep an eye on the other children, and accordingly it was thirty-five minutes before it was over and the things which they had used were

put away. As far as I could judge, the initiative in this was taken by the children.

While this was going on, many of the children were using the sand-paper letters. One or two were writing the letter which they had in sand-paper beside them on their slates. I noticed one child who had a *d*, but he was making it like a *q* with a short curve instead of the up-stroke of the *q*. This struck me as very curious.

There was a great deal of free movement about the room, which was of course much larger than any of the other Beni Stabili working-rooms. This took place very quietly, and there was no trace of an abuse of their freedom. When the dictation was over and all the children were back in their places, they got up and sang two songs. They had of course no piano, but the singing was nevertheless agreeable. Then they once more made a tiptoe excursion among the tables, and afterwards went for a short time to the playroom, where they sang and marched, played a game of catch, and then marched with an arm movement. It was a quarter past eleven when they returned to their tables, and before they resumed their seats they had a jumping exercise as they stood in front of their chairs, and they again practised sitting down quietly. It takes a lot of practice to free fifty-three children of the tendency to scrape the floor with their chairs.

All the material had not been put away, and some of the children simply continued doing what they had been doing before they went out. The directrice heard one boy read. A little girl went to the blackboard and began to write. She made frequent appeals to the directrice as to the correct pronunciation of the words she was trying to write, and the writing being so big and plain, the directrice had no difficulty in giving her the guidance she needed, although attending to other things meanwhile.

Of course every one who visits a Beni Stabili Casa has to have a ticket signed by Signor Talamo, but at twenty minutes past eleven three visitors arrived—two Americans, a man and a woman, and an English woman—without tickets. The English woman seated herself at the directrice's table and began examining the papers on it, and the American lady began giving in no very gentle voice to the American a long account of the Beni Stabili Society. It might very well have been given prior to the visit, or shall I say incursion. The directrice, of course, did not understand any of the American's discourse, but she did not like the invasion, and the children began to get restless. It was thirty-five minutes past eleven when she started them singing. This was decidedly a good move, and the visitors departed.

The children then took off their pinafores. The material had been put away and the time that

remained before twelve o'clock was spent in marching on the terrace.

Half-past one was the time for reassembling. When the children were in their places the directrice went through the silence game. She called about twelve of the children.

Some of the boys had brought with them into school a beautiful green beetle which they had just found. They brought it up to the directrice. It was a golden opportunity for a little nature study, but beetles lay outside the directrice's sphere of interest, and all she did was to put the beetle outside the window. The appeal which the beetle made to the children was shown when, on the entry of the porter for the attendance list some time later, those near the window seized the opportunity of seeing how it was getting on.

It will be remembered that at the Via Famagosta the directrice and her assistant passed round the insets and pencils for the drawing in the afternoon, though they gave the children free choice as to the shape of inset and the colour of pencil. They had not kept the children waiting long.

Apparently here the directrice imitated the procedure at the Via Famagosta, but the imitation introduced further disadvantages. The assistant produced a mass of half-finished outlines, which she proceeded to pass round, though the children would probably

have found their own in quite an orderly way. It was consequently a quarter of an hour after they began to give out the papers that they began to give round the pencils, and they did not trouble about letting the children choose their colours. Those of the children to whom the assistant had already brought a metal inset or who had an outline previously drawn could now begin. A good many children, however, had no outline and had to wait, and they were still waiting at 2.35. I thought that the patience with which they waited was remarkable. Thinking of the time that had been consumed in this getting ready, the advantage of a time-table for collective work was obvious. Had twenty minutes been down for drawing on the time-table, twenty minutes would hardly have been taken up in passing round the tools. Having seen how orderly the children were and how well able to help themselves, there seemed here a very unhappy relapse into the ways of an ancient method. No attempt either was made to seat the little ones, who could not draw their outline and did not know how to proceed, near the elder ones. Some of the little ones, of course, happened to be near older children, and these worked the best. Many of the little ones did not try to do anything, and one child went to sleep. Forty minutes after this work was supposed to commence they were still at it. Several of the children brought up their work to show the directrice. One

child was crying, and a little later another child cried. At three o'clock most of the drawings were collected, but there were some children who preferred to go on colouring. None of the children had the interesting outlined pictures such as the elder boys and girls in Milan delighted in. The only free drawings done were done by the pupils of the municipal school who came in and sat at the back.

The blinds had been down to keep out the sun, but they were now drawn up partially. The directrice asked some of the children to say some poetry. In the case of one child there was some hesitation and shyness, but two girls, then a boy, and then another girl volunteered, and did it very well. This seemed to interest the other children. At any rate they sat still. Two younger children counted up to ten. This all occupied only a few minutes. At a quarter past three they sang. Then they did arm exercise, clapping their hands in front of and behind them. They also did a foot exercise intended to enable them to go on tiptoe.

Then they filed out on to the terrace in order of size and wound round in the form of a spiral. A number of heads appeared at the windows of the flats above the Casa. It was a very pretty sight to see the children making the spiral with the little ones at the back. Then some leather reins were produced. One child put them on and another drove him all round

the spiral lines. Meanwhile the children sang. All this was watched with great interest by the people at the windows.

Then the children formed a ring, and while little ones threw a ball to each other inside the ring, two big ones used the reins on the outside.

They played these organized games for half an hour. The elder children were the leaders. The directrice and the assistant simply looked on. Then the ring broke up and the children had free play until it was time to go home. The collective play in the playground seemed as successful here as it had been in the Via Marsi.

While the children were amusing themselves in the various ways that appealed to them, the directrice took me round the courtyard. Five men, she told me, were employed by the Beni Stabili Society in the care of the flats, one of these a gardener. At the back of the block in which was the Casa dei Bambini there were baths, hot and cold, which the inhabitants could use for a small sum. Beside the bath-house was a large airy room in which were some sewing-machines. These the women could hire at what seemed a very cheap rate, and there were several women sitting there at work when we went in. I asked about a common kitchen, which Dr. Montessori had referred to in her book. This had not yet been realized. This big pleasant room with the sewing-machines

was, however, as may easily be imagined, a great advantage to the mothers. It spoke well for the inhabitants that such an arrangement was possible.

We came back to the children as they played on the terrace covered by loose grey pebbles, in front of the Casa with its clustering roses. A vision of a bald ugly London playground came before my eyes. How different this ! yet what would little Londoners have said to the small space, the loose pebbles, and the steps which led down to the courtyard, down which these bambini could hasten with certain tread, but which surely for London babies would have been deemed dangerous ? I pondered, only half listening to what the directrice was saying, becoming attentive, however, when she ceased suddenly. I followed her glance. Among the children there had appeared a facsimile of herself dressed in a similar muslin blouse, white with red spots, and carrying in her arms a tiny mite quaintly decorated with a pinafore made of the identical red-spotted muslin. I understood at once. It was her six-months old baby. No doubt the children loved it. No red tape shut it out from the Casa dei Bambini.

CHAPTER VIII

VIA GIUSTI

It was a great contrast to pass from the memory of the directrice of the Casa in the Via Giordano Bruno, with her six-months old baby and the vivid scarlet of her spotted muslin, to sight of the directrice in the little school held in the Franciscan Convent in the Via Giusti. The latter was one of the sisters, a young one, trained by Dr. Montessori, and wearing the grey habit of her order. Her hair was hidden from view by the white linen bands which surrounded her face. The first day that I was there a second sister sat in the corner, similarly dressed, and either she or a third one, I am not sure which, played the piano when it was wanted. She was an excellent musician.

The room used for the children in the Via Giusti Convent was long and fairly wide. Chairs for visitors were placed against the wall. A door which led in from the chapel was at the one end, and a door nearer the window on the same side opened out into the lavatories and room where the children washed the plates which were used for the meal of which they partook. A wide glass door led into the beautiful convent garden, and the space in front of this wide glass door, which was kept open, was clear except for the piano on the one side of it. A double oval line was painted on the floor. The little tables were set in the middle

of the room, and on the first occasion on which I was there all faced the end towards the garden. There was, however, no table for the directrice; she and a novice, also dressed in grey, though not in the Franciscan habit, moved about among the children.

Visitors were not admitted until ten o'clock, and we first went into the chapel. The children were inside the altar rails on their knees, repeating a number of long prayers. There was no music. Then they rose and came out, taking hands in pairs. They turned and bowed to the altar and then came down the chapel aisle, still taking hands in pairs. We went on into the working room through the door on the right of the altar, and had taken our seats round the wall when the children came in by the door which led from the lavatories. They at once came up and shook hands with us, then they seated themselves at the tables.

One of the boys went to the cupboard and got out the material and went round the tables offering the various things to the other children. They could take what they liked. One of the little girls wrote on the blackboard in the facile, excellent writing which seems the result of use of the sand-paper letters, and when she had finished, she was followed by others. The children changed their work when they liked, they had out a great variety of material and they put away what they had finished with. They were

quiet and subdued over their work, but it was my unprejudiced opinion that they were interested. I should never have thought of saying that they were bored, they seemed to work steadily and of their own initiative.

The directrice told me that no visitors came in the afternoon, and that the afternoon was devoted to drawing and games. I did not succeed in getting permission to be present in the afternoon, but I formed a good idea of the drawing done, for one of the little boys brought a large portfolio of his work and showed it to me and the lady who sat next to me. It contained simple outlines made with the geometrical metal insets, and went on to much more elaborate designs made with the same frames. These were very well coloured, and the colours used were well chosen and harmonized. It seemed to me excellent work. There were, too, in the portfolio a number of free drawings.

The children were not reproved for talking to one another or for getting up from their seats. There was no need for reproof, the children were very orderly and seemed very happy.

In the course of the morning the directrice went through the silence game, which the children did very well. There were between twenty and twenty-five children present. Then after the children had worked at the material for about an hour one of the

sisters played the piano, and the children walked round sometimes on one line, sometimes on the two, while holding each other's hands. No word of command was given, but the children changed their pace and steps as the music changed. They also sang a number of little songs.

One elaborate piece of apparatus was shown, bells devised for training the sense of pitch. I believe I did see some of these bells in some of the other Case, but this was the only Casa, except the one in Bellinzona, in which I saw them used. This was, of course, one of the days on which the sisters expected visitors. There was a visitors' day once a week. Dr. Montessori's students, however, went there on other days for their observation work. These bells were set out in two rows. One of them was struck; and the little boy who did the exercise had to find the second bell with the same pitch and tone. He seemed to have a good ear. But I don't think this is a game which had established itself or was likely to do so.

Two of the children were chosen as the servers for the day, and they began their lunch before the others. The other children went out into the garden, and the little servers arranged the tables set round in a horse-shoe shape, put on the cloths and laid them with glasses, spoons, and plates. They wore little white aprons, and set about their work in a businesslike way.

Meanwhile the children in the beautiful garden were hardly acting as one expected children to act, and it was here in the open that one realized the difference which having the school in the convent made. A group of them went round to the cloister at the side in which there was a majolica image of the 'Man of Sorrows'. Before this these tiny children prostrated themselves. Another group gathered round the directrice, who held out one of her hands palm downwards above their heads, and they touched it with their finger-tips as they gently moved round her. I saw none really play, and though the garden was lovely, with beds of glorious crimson roses, yet I hardly think it was to these children what the garden with their own little garden plots was to the children in the Via Solari.

We returned to the room, and the children seated themselves. Then one of the little servers carried round the tureen of hot soup, and the children helped themselves in turn from it. It was of course a very pretty sight. But these were children from better-class homes. I saw one of the mothers, a well-dressed woman; and the parents paid something to the sisters for the instruction, though not very much. A meal like this would have had, of course, far greater value had it been possible in the Via Marsi. Still, it showed how thorough and painstaking even such very young children will be, and there was never any

difficulty in getting servers. The work appealed to the children.

As I went out the sister at the door inquired what I had thought of their school. I answered quite sincerely that I thought it was excellent. I certainly should have liked to see the afternoon work. One English teacher, 'M. or N.' by the way, went in the afternoon, and possibly for her benefit the material was offered to the children. They were only accustomed to use it in the morning, and this no doubt accounted for their unwillingness to use it in the afternoon. I do not think the inference that the material did not appeal to them was warranted by their refusing to use it in the afternoon. It only showed that they did enjoy a very large measure of freedom, and that there was no real, even gentle, repression. In the afternoon it is quite possible that they may have played games. Their marching to the music had been very good.

Ten days intervened between my first and second visit. So many visitors applied for tickets that it was difficult for any one person to go many times. A great many people went out of mere curiosity. I met, for instance, a young American lady in Venice who had been. She had no connexion with educational work. The lady who sat next to me on my first visit made it clear from the questions she asked that she knew nothing about the method. Now these visitors who

had cards of admission signed by Dr. Montessori, and bearing on the back requests that they should sit still and not talk, soon forgot all about these requests, and got up and walked about and entered into conversation with one another. There was an American on the occasion of my first visit who was making notes of all he saw: he did not do his seeing unaided, but was told all about it by an indefatigable American lady who, I gathered, attended these open days as often as she could and, I expect, talked as industriously as she could on all such occasions. As to the effect on the teachers, I do not think the visitors affected the sister who was directrice much, if any. She was of a calm and tranquil temperament, and of that firm and sweet disposition which enabled her to exercise a quietening effect on the children. Nor do I think that the visitors made much difference to the children. Of course they liked to show their drawing portfolios, but that did not hurt them. Possibly the children did not embark on new tasks much on the open days, but did what they knew they could do, though this depended largely on the teacher and would not be true of what I saw on my second visit.

This took place on a Monday, and when I arrived at ten o'clock, they looked very curiously at my ticket on which the date was written. Evidently they were unprepared for visitors, and I was quite hoping that

I should be the only one and should be able to watch the children without the chatter of the curious. I went through the chapel, which was empty, into the working-room. One end was occupied by a stage, so that little more than half of the room was available. I saw a sister hurrying into the garden where the directrice was walking with the children and speak to her. The directrice came in with the children. Just then Dr. Montessori arrived, and I had the pleasure of seeing the delight with which she was greeted by the children, who gathered close round her to shake hands. The photograph of Dr. Montessori is well known, but she is one of those people who are better in real life than in a photograph. She is a very beautiful woman, and looked almost regal, or what we imagine to be regal, in her deep mourning with a long crêpe veil hanging down her back.

A number of visitors, chiefly Americans, came, but there were also present some of Dr. Montessori's students. The Americans presented one another to Dr. Montessori. Among them was the distinguished educationist, Miss Jane Addams of Chicago, and one saw that it interested her to watch the children. She withdrew herself from the others for quite a length of time and sat observing the children at work.

To-day the sister was directrice only in name. For a short time after Dr. Montessori's arrival, Signorina Maccheroni, whose name is well known to

readers of Dr. Montessori's book, came in. I learnt who she was from hearing the children say her name as they sprang forward to meet her.

I learnt here how dangerous it is to generalize. On the basis of my last visit I should have said that a great deal was made of writing at the Via Giusti, and that excellence in writing was evidently one of the chief objects aimed at. To-day, on the contrary, hardly any writing was done. Not a child went to the blackboard, and as Signorina Maccheroni passed from child to child they made their interest in whatever work they were doing evident. Many had out the colour tablets. This morning the material was not passed out to them, but each child took out its own. There were but eighteen children present. Some of the tables were in rows, but some were placed round the outside, just inside where the visitors sat. Some of the children arranged all the shades of the eight different colours. They had only one tablet of each shade, not a pair as they had usually had in Milan. Some of the children began doing number-work with the long stair on the floor. This piece of apparatus is much more satisfactory when used on the floor. It would be interesting to discover why in the Beni Stabili Case practically no work is done on the floor—that is, as far as my experience went. These boys had out as well as the long stair the frames for the number cards, and when Signorina Maccheroni

came to them they began making numbers greater than ten and putting the cards which represented the number made in the frame. Their delight when by adding on the nine to the ten and the eight to these two they obtained a long row of twenty-seven, which they knew how to represent with the number cards, was unmistakable. Even the most obstinately prejudiced person could find no trace of boredom there, and they went on for a long time making number after number, counting the row of red and blue spaces and representing it with the number cards.

One little girl was doing number-work with the box of sticks. She counted the sticks, put a different number in each compartment of the box, and set the appropriate number card against it. Another child had the lacing frame. In twenty-five minutes most of the children had changed their material. Signorina Maccheroni flitted from child to child, sitting down beside them, or when they were working on the floor, kneeling beside them. To one little boy she gave a colour lesson, showing him how to match the colours in pairs. To a little girl she gave a letter lesson, showing her how to trace the letters and to make their sounds. It was not till half-past ten that they got out the solid insets. The plane insets had been out from the first. At a quarter to eleven a little boy put away all the colour tablets; one of the last children to use them had counted them. It was the first time

that I had seen a child counting them. Usually, if they were used for anything except arranging in pairs or series, it was for building. Near to where I sat a little girl had a basket containing folded papers. She took these out one by one, unfolded them, and read the word written in script characters. I saw such words as 'mano', 'fiore', 'nero'. Some she knew that she had read correctly, others she took to Signorina Maccheroni in order to make certain. One child had a number of coins on a slate, and was, I think, learning their names. There was one child who had out one of the metal insets and was drawing the outline with chalk upon his slate. But by eleven o'clock the activity had greatly subsided. Several children were looking out of the window. Although there was here direct access to the open, yet there was apparently not that complete freedom of going out and coming in which obtained in Milan. The numbers were of course less, there were more trained helpers, and a consideration which was no doubt of great importance in establishing this daily work with the material from ten to between eleven and half-past eleven, was the convenience of the students who used this and two of the other schools for their observation work.

By ten minutes past eleven a great deal of the material had been put away and some of the tiniest children were busy rolling up the rugs. At half-past

eleven only one child was at work. She had a slate and on it she wrote the number 88, which she showed to some of the visitors with pride.

The little servers had already begun their lunch, sitting at a table under the window. While they were laying the tables for the others, three of the children came in from the garden and carried out tables and a good deal of material. There, in an open space between the rose-beds, they arranged themselves as if working at the material, and were photographed with Dr. Montessori herself looking on. The photographing over, they came in to lunch, and the little servers, as before, carried round the soup and gave to the children the little baskets in which they had brought food from home.

Numerous as the visitors were, and complete as was their disregard to the rule of silence and immobility, yet it seemed to me that they affected neither Signorina Maccheroni nor the children. The children worked not only steadily but with delight. It is impossible to think for a minute that the material did not appeal to them. They were learning through it what they could not learn without material of some sort. Different material might, of course, serve the same purpose. Two of the staff at the Pedagogic Institute at Geneva have devised something simpler and less expensive, but this I have not seen. To say that Dr. Montessori's material interests the children

and gives them tasks to do which it is within their power to accomplish, and the completion of which arouses and maintains a sense of orderliness, is not to say that it is the only material which could do this. Froebel in his gifts set himself to think out material to be taken seriatim and to be used in prescribed ways, but even the Froebelians have discarded this. To my mind there is not the slightest doubt that from the physiological point of view, and consequently from the point of view of what it accomplishes, Dr. Montessori's material is the best that we know. What we mean by self-expression, if indeed we know exactly what we do mean, has its value; but human beings, if they are to participate in the way educated people regard things and in the tools which they use, must acquire, on a basis of considerable perceptual experience, the concepts that constitute these tools and are involved in the educated person's view. Such concepts, to take some of the very simplest, are width and depth, and these are taught in a manner suited to a child as yet in the perceptual stage by the solid insets, which he learns to use, thereby training fingers and eyes, long before he is taught the words 'high' and 'wide'. I certainly think that any mathematics or science teacher teaching about areas and volumes in the metric system would be glad to make use of the Montessori material. I felt when I was watching the children in the Via Marsi that so much

more of the arithmetic could have been done in connexion with it than was done, and kept concrete, only perhaps the arithmetic so taught would not have fitted in so well with what the municipal schools required. The beauty of the material is that it can be put to uses suited to different stages of development.

There was no mere repetition of operations already learnt that morning, but on the part of many children real advance, an advance, too, of which they were conscious and in which they took pride and pleasure. And all this was accomplished without the least appeal to emulation. In this it agreed with all the Case that I saw. This one thing these schools have conclusively proved, that consciousness of progress and power of self-criticism are much safer and more effective motives than emulation, and that the children are more charming and better just because they are never shown off. What they can do is not regarded as due to the cleverness of the teacher—though often this is involved—but the doing of the children themselves, the manifestation of the power that is in them. I think even the show boy in the Via Marsi was in a sense the show boy without any of that feeling of superiority which would belong to one of our show boys. His simplicity in their games and his general behaviour struck me as being quite different from what I should have expected from a show boy. Perhaps after all I did him and the directrice of the Via Marsi wrong by

calling him the show boy. Probably where the cleverness of a child is not regarded as the outcome of the teacher's cleverness but as a gift of God, when it is plainly not the result of the child's own endeavours, there can be no show boys. And if there were no show boys, what disappointments might be prevented.

CHAPTER IX

FUA FUSINATA

This was another of the three schools to which Dr. Montessori's students went. It belonged to the Municipio, so that it was possible to get cards of admission, both from the Municipio and from Dr. Montessori, who had general supervision. A lady at my hotel, who was the head of several kindergartens in Japan, had taken an Italian-speaking friend with her to the Municipio and had obtained a card of admission. But when she went with it, she was told that building operations were going on and no one could be admitted.

I had a card of admission from Dr. Montessori, but the first time I went I was told of the alterations and that no one was admitted. As proof of the truth of his statements the porter pointed to a pile of bricks near the door. I asked him to go up and inquire when I could go. He brought down word 'the following

Wednesday'. Accordingly I took the precaution of taking my ticket to Dr. Montessori's and having the date changed.

Wednesday came, and I again presented myself. I was again refused admission. However, I said that I would like to speak to the directrice, and walked upstairs. A very young girl came to the head of the stairs and said that I could not come in. I assured her that it was my last opportunity, and that at any rate I would like to see the rooms. By this time I had edged near to the door of one of the rooms. I felt as a reporter must feel when he is trying to interview some great and unwilling person. The room into which I looked was indeed undergoing plastering. It seemed very curious to make so much disturbance in term-time. Nothing less than a ceiling which momentarily threatened to fall would have justified it. However, this was Rome, and not two hundred yards from the Capitol, and so one forgave what was not quite modern in the proceeding.

I advanced into the room, and from a doorway I saw two inner rooms in which there were children at work, and this notwithstanding the reiterated assertion of the young directrice that 'the little byes do not woerk to-day'. I politely inquired in Italian if they were then going home at once. She said 'yes', but she must have meant 'no', for no departures were contemplated.

Moreover, I had seen an English lady sitting in the innermost room, and I now advanced boldly, saying that if she could be there, I could also. The young directrice gave me up and returned to the table in the corner of the third room, at which an equally young colleague and Signorina Maccheroni were seated busy in consultation, perhaps over the biographical charts. I stood beside the English lady. She recommended me to sit down, but I said that I could hardly do that unless I were invited. For perhaps ten minutes I stood. Then Signorina Maccheroni came up and told us that no one could come without a ticket and so we must both go. I produced my ticket bearing the correct day and date. Even then I could not stay. I had better go to the Via Trionfale, which was at least two miles off. I said that my ticket for the Via Trionfale was at home and was for a different date. If, therefore, I really could not stay, would she write on the envelope to say that I had not been able to stay at Fua Fusinata and had been sent to the Via Trionfale. She wrote this. As she finished writing, she suddenly repented, perhaps because I had remarked that I was a sensible person and could make allowances for the disorder caused by the decorators. But the English lady had to go, although she had been one of the students, and I was offered her chair, and took it not without a good deal of inward amusement.

Signorina Maccheroni, it seems, came to this school twice a week. It occupied a suite of apartments in a building devoted to a girls' secondary school. This suite consisted of the three rooms I had traversed, lavatories and cloakroom beyond, and a roof-garden. The rooms were square and large, with big windows which overlooked the flat roof. In the middle room there was a piano, and there were several blackboards round the walls. All the tables were, during the alterations, in the end room. These were tables for one, and were in rows facing the windows. For working on the floor the children had jute mats, not rugs. There were also blackboards round the end room, so that the children were very well provided in that respect.

A number of writing-books were on the table in the window near where I had stood and was afterwards sitting. I did not think that the writing was so good as some of that I had seen, and I noticed that one little boy had done a whole page of the same letter. The English lady explained that it must have been his own wish to do this, but I had seen no pages of this kind elsewhere. Probably the reason was that work that the children in the Beni Stabili Case did on slates was here done on paper. When done on a slate the child rubs out the letter until he or she makes one that is satisfactory. Here all the attempts remained staring the child in the face. It seems to

me a mistake to begin paper-work too soon. Besides, the letters I saw written on slate or blackboard were much nearer the size of the sand-paper letters, and much better for the beginners than were these letters in the books.

All the children were busy. Some were using the colour tablets, one had the long stair, some were writing, and some were doing arithmetic. Each child had a portfolio in which he kept his drawings, and here, apparently, they did the colouring any time they wished to do so. The more elaborate designs for colouring were not made by the children with the frames, an operation which brought into play the child's ingenuity, but they used printed designs, which had ' Montessori Method ' in one corner.

One boy was writing on one of the blackboards in the end room. He was taking the sentences he was writing from a book which he had open beside him. A number of other children went into the middle room and were drawing on the blackboards there. When, however, one of the two young girls followed them in and, seating herself at the piano, commenced to play, they left the blackboards and began to march round, altering their pace and step as the music changed. This was very pretty, and so was their singing, which they began with no more bidding than that of the music. From singing they returned to marching, and when Signorina Maccheroni came in,

she started, without a word, showing them a new step, taking round one or two of the children, those perhaps who she knew could pick up new steps quickly. When they could do it she left them to teach the others by letting them imitate. They were learning, but without worry, and without any of those directions which make ordinary marching and dancing lessons so lacking in beauty and semblance of spontaneity.

Signorina Maccheroni returned to the inner room and to the boys who were doing arithmetic. They were evidently beginning their tables, and she wrote out for them the two times table. Two or three boys went about with the paper she had written learning it very seriously.

One or two of the well-dressed parents came into the room and entered into conversation with the young directrices. It was evident that they took great interest in the work their children did. To know how the children were getting on they had to examine their work. There was no place in class to rely on.

None of the children shook hands, and several of them brushed past me as I sat without any apology. I was not sure whether this was a transitory condition like the state of the rooms. By and by the Indian schoolmaster who had been a student in the course, and whom I had seen at the Via Giusti, arrived with his camera. He first photographed the sentences

which the little boy had been copying on to the blackboard in the corner. Then he, Signorina Maccheroni, the two young directrices, and the children went out to the roof-garden, carrying with them a great deal of the material. No one invited me to accompany them, so I remained behind. But I lost nothing, for I could see the groups being arranged from the window. I felt rather disappointed at the thought that it was necessary to arrange groups. If the children had been photographed when really working, without knowing that they were being photographed, there would have been so much more psychological and pedagogic interest attached to the photographs.

As I traversed the rooms on my way out, Signorina Maccheroni met me. She had come in from the roof-garden. She asked me what I had thought of it. I replied that I thought the children were very good. They had certainly shown no ill effects from the disorganization of the rooms. It was quite easy to see that they really did work on their own initiative, and that they did not abuse the freedom which they undoubtedly were permitted. Of course I missed the friendly handshake, but perhaps the children had regarded me as one of the students and, therefore, not to be taken any notice of.

It struck me afterwards that the reluctance of the young directrice and Signorina Maccheroni to allow

me to stay was on account of the photographing, which they knew was going to disturb the routine of the latter part of the morning.

This was, of course, a school which received fees from the parents. I do not know the precise number in attendance. There were certainly about forty children there on the occasion of my visit. It corresponded to a kindergarten in one of our high schools, with this difference, that it was independent of the mistress of the upper school. What it would have been without the two visits weekly of Signorina Maccheroni I cannot of course judge. But if Dr. Montessori's ideal of self-discipline for the children is one which can be successfully carried out, as it certainly could in the hands of Signorina Maccheroni, then there must be many more teachers who could carry it out provided that they are allowed to try.

CHAPTER X

VIA TRIONFALE

The Casa dei Bambini in the Via Trionfale was the most recently started of all the schools using the Montessori material. It was only opened at the very end of March, and my first visit was paid on the twelfth of May. It was situated in the same district as the Via Famagosta and the Via Giordano Bruno.

It belonged to the Municipio but, like the school in Fua Fusinata, was under the general direction of Dr. Montessori. Cards of admission were obtainable both from the Municipio and Dr. Montessori. It occupied rooms in one of the very large municipal schools, the Adelaide Cairol School, which formed a long block of building, with a large courtyard in the middle, stretching from one street to the next, near the end of one of the lines of tramway. The streets just round the school were in an intermediate condition, no longer country roads, but not yet town streets. The street in which the main entrance to the school was, was superior to the street from which one entered the Casa dei Bambini.

On this side there was a railed-in strip of ground which ran along the whole length of the building. It was not very wide, not more than thirty feet. It communicated with the inner courtyard of the school by an archway. The door leading into the suite of rooms occupied by the Casa dei Bambini was on the left of this archway. The windows of the working-room overlooked this strip of ground, and the part which lay between the archway and the one end of the strip was railed off. There was a gate near the archway and a second gate opened on to the street, so that the children could enter and leave the Casa dei Bambini without coming in contact with any of the other children of the school. The younger

girls of the Municipal School came out to play in the enclosed space beyond that devoted to the babies.

This railed-in space was bare and covered with brick-ends. It was just a piece of waste ground, and the children delighted in wheeling the brick-ends about in their little barrows. There had not yet been time to turn it into a garden, but such a change was contemplated, and on my second visit I found that some of the elder boys from the school had volunteered their help, that flower beds were marked out, and that digging was about to be done. There was no reason why it should not become as satisfactory a garden as that in the Via Solari at Milan.

The directrice of this Casa was a teacher trained by Dr. Montessori, one who resided in her house with her. There were only just over twenty children, and the school hours were from nine till twelve. With a morning session of three hours only it is not possible to do for children what can be done for them with a seven-hours day. When children spend seven hours in school six days a week, the habits which they form there have a good chance of becoming their life-habits. The directrice of this Casa also did not live in the district—Dr. Montessori's house was at least a mile away—and the parents were scattered about in the different streets, so that there was not the same facility for keeping in touch with them as was offered by the Casa in a block of dwellings. It was therefore

a school of quite a different type, and from the first day that it opened it had been used as an observation school by Dr. Montessori's students.

In addition to the directrice there was a young girl as assistant, but she looked after the children in the lavatory and hardly appeared in the working-room.

The general procedure seemed that of the Via Giusti: the children had free play until ten o'clock, and when I arrived at half-past nine I found them busy in the enclosure, playing with their wheelbarrows and building houses with some large brown wooden bricks, which were like the largest block of the broad stair. Some of the children had little brooms, and they swept the enclosure, making a great dust. There was on the inner side a paling such as Dr. Montessori describes in her book. It had strong uprights about a metre apart and somewhat over a metre high. Between these on the ground ran a thick board on which the children could stand as they reached up to the lower of the two crossbars which ran about a foot apart between the uprights at their upper end. The paling constituted horizontal bars suitable for very young children, and the children certainly liked swinging along the lower rod or standing on it without more support than that afforded by the upper rod against their legs. It seemed a very cheap apparatus for providing children with a good and suitable exercise.

At ten o'clock the children went in. One little boy was brought by his father, and every day, I was told, there were tears when the father left. The latter was evidently accustomed to spoil the child, and probably several of the twenty children were what we should call spoilt children. This, as well as the short school hours, should be borne in mind in judging the results of the method.

The door under the archway led into a wide passage in which the hats were hung. Next to the entrance there was a lavatory with several washhand basins, where the children washed when they came in from the open.

The working-room was a long room with windows on the one side. It had evidently been made by throwing two classrooms into one. It had a marble floor, there was a good deal of white paint, and all the furniture was white. There were blackboards all round the walls about a foot and a half high. There were tables for two, and these were arranged in two rows of seven, facing one way, in that part of the room farthest from the entrance. Chairs for visitors and students were placed round the walls of this part of the room. There was plenty of space for the directrice to pass between them and the tables, and there was a wide middle aisle. The directrice could therefore readily see what any individual child was doing. She had no table herself, but moved about among the

children, or stood or sat on a larger chair in front of them.

Just beyond the projections from the wall, which showed where the partition between the two rooms had formerly been, the piano stood to the left. Against the wall beyond this was a large cupboard for the material, and another stood against the end wall. The door which led to the lavatory was at the right-hand corner of the end wall. There were three big windows in each part of the room. The buff blinds were on projecting frames, so that there was no difficulty about having the windows open when the blinds were down. The windows opened at the top with a projecting flap.

The children came in from the lavatory and seated themselves in their comfortable little arm-chairs. The directrice first gave them some practice in moving their chairs quietly, without scraping the marble floor, and then in passing quietly and carefully between the tables.

Two boys then went to the cupboard and brought out the frames. Many of the children refused those which they were offered. Other material was also got out.

I sat at the end of the room behind the children. A good many students had come in, and there was such a buzz of conversation at the side of the room that I thought I should be better off at the end. It was,

however, much more difficult to get a comprehensive idea of what they were all doing from behind. I therefore chose for observation one particular boy, whom I shall call 'the pink boy' on account of the colour of his pinafore.

He began with the solid insets and used these properly for ten minutes. At seventeen minutes past ten he took the colour tablets and attempted to build with them. He had a free fight with another child, and in the course of this the colour tablets were upset. He picked them up, but after arranging some, shook them about in the box. He was seated quite close to me, at a table near the last window. Two of the students armed with a camera came up and wanted to photograph him. They therefore moved his table nearer the window and arranged the material on the table suitably. Just, however, as they were ready to take the photograph the boy moved off. There was a good deal of humour in the situation. They had made no appeal to the boy to play his part in getting the photograph taken. I suppose that they did not know enough Italian to speak to him. His unresponsiveness astonished me after my experience of the charming and responsive children in the other Case dei Bambini.

He seated himself at another table and worked at the geometrical insets. At a quarter to eleven he put these away and went out at the door which led

to the lavatory. In five minutes he returned, bringing with him a set of circular insets of different sizes. He had some conversation with some children behind him, who were doing the solid insets, and he had another small fight. He put away the circles at two minutes past eleven, and then assisted in rolling up one of the carpets which had been used in the room with the cupboards by children who worked on the floor. He tried to get into the lavatory again and was kept out for some time by the assistant, but finally got in.

At seven minutes past eleven most of the material had been put away and the children were taking their seats. At ten past eleven fifteen children were seated, but the directrice had a struggle with one little boy who would not sit down. After going away, however, he came back quietly. The children covered their faces and sat quiet. The directrice moved on tiptoe down the middle aisle and came near me in front of the blackboard, calling the children's names in a whisper, as is done in the silence game.

At twenty past eleven some one went to the piano and began to play, and the children went into the first room and marched round, keeping to one or other or both of the double lines on the floor. When they walked on the two lines, the children took hands in pairs. As in the other Case where there were pianos, they changed their step and pace as the music changed. After five minutes they began to sing,

then the music changed to a march again, but by half-past eleven there were several children sitting down and some were looking in the cupboard. Even the song which followed did not attract all back. The pink boy and several of the other children had provided themselves with paper, pencils, and the metal insets, and went to the tables in order to colour outlines. The directrice in several cases helped the children to draw the outlines. In less than five minutes the pink boy got a fresh piece of paper out of the cupboard. There were eleven children now drawing, but at five minutes to twelve some of them put their drawings in the drawer. At one minute to twelve the pink boy and five others were still colouring, but at twelve o'clock the pink boy went away and left his drawing on the table.

I had chosen this little boy quite at random, simply because he was near me at the beginning of the work and because his pink pinafore made him easy to recognize. I had no opportunity of learning his age.

The tower and broad stair were used on carpets in the inner room and the children rolled up the carpets themselves. Some letter-work was done. A little girl, for instance, took out the letters at ten minutes to eleven. The directrice went to her and gave her a five-minutes lesson. Then the directrice went away, but returned and finished the letters while surrounded

by three children, but they were all put away by two minutes past eleven. There was no writing done—the children, of course, were not sufficiently advanced, the school having only been so recently opened. All the children, I think, were younger than six.

Twelve days later I went again. The students had gone, all except one of the English students, who was staying behind to get extra practice in teaching. Her presence was unfortunate, as it prevented my seeing the children under ordinary conditions. For instead of letting the English student move round among the children as she did, and assist her, as the directrices at the Via Giusti and Fua Fusinata Case assisted Signorina Maccheroni, the directrice moved three tables into the inner room and sent in six children to work under the supervision of the English student.

After the children had, as before, practised walking quietly about, practice very necessary in a room with a marble floor, a boy went to the cupboard and fetched out the frames. He offered them first to the English student's six children and then to the children in the farther room.

When the children were playing outside in the heat, which became very great before ten o'clock, one child had attracted my attention, because wherever he went he fought. This peevish child, like the other children, took refuge from the sun in the shade of the archway,

but instead of sitting there quietly he wandered into the inner courtyard and found some brick steps which descended possibly to a coal-cellar. He got on the wall which bounded these steps, where he might easily have had a bad fall, and the directrice told him to come away. He took no notice, however, and she had to drag him away. He was the first disobedient child I had seen in any of the Case, and he certainly needed special treatment. He was getting discipline from the other children, as my morning's observations showed. But in the meantime he was giving visitors a very bad impression of this school.

Naturally this peevish child continued to attract my attention. His first act was to take waste paper out of the waste-paper basket, and the other children had been working steadily for some time at the frames and the three solid insets before he was sent to put this paper away. He then got out a lacing frame.

The six children in the inner room had two solid insets and colour tablets. One of them began mixing up all the colours and another began building with the tablets. Even the children with the solid insets, which were usually so satisfactory, did not go on steadily. One child took the cylinders and kept them from the child who should have been using them. Then a third child took away the stand. Meanwhile the child with the cylinders dropped them on to the floor. The English student picked up the stand, and

the boy gave her the cylinders, which he picked up from the floor one by one. Then another boy threw them all down again on the floor and put down the stand. The first boy, that is the boy who had first dropped the cylinders on to the floor, then got on the table. The directrice saw this and came to him and took him into her part of the room. She set him at one of her tables with one of the frames, but before long he returned to the three little tables, bringing with him a fourth set of solid insets.

At the directrice's tables the children, busy with the frames, changed them with one another in an orderly way. One child had out the long stair on the floor. One of these fourteen children began building with the colour tablets, but when the directrice came near she stopped. She began again, however, as soon as the directrice was attending to some one else. Still, among these children it was plain that a conscience with regard to the proper use of the material was growing up, for another child drew the directrice's attention to this building. The directrice did not interfere, and, as far as my experience went, I should say that the children were not encouraged to tell tales of one another. The child whose conscience was disturbed by the building then acted for herself, and knocked down the house which the other child had built. The children undoubtedly do discipline each other in this way.

A Casa newly opened labours under peculiar disadvantages, for at first there are no children ready to take the lead in the maintenance of order.

The peevish child had soon got tired of his lacing frame, and he set himself to put the directrice's chair facing the tables. As there was no reason for doing this, other children tried to remove it; however, when their attention was diverted, he brought it back. He then went up to a little girl who was pairing the colour tablets and interfered with her.

One of the children had taken out a rug and the pink tower and was building on the floor. The peevish child's next act was to come and knock it down and then to begin to rebuild. But of course the child who had taken it out resented this, with the consequence that the peevish child was soon crying. No one took any notice at first, and this, of course, was the best way of treating him. The English student tried to take his hand, but he did not want this at all. He consoled himself by getting another rug and another pink tower. There was apparently more material in this Casa than the Case were usually supplied with. This time another child came and knocked one of his cubes off, and of course he cried again. This time he was left to recover himself.

It was not often that the cubes of the pink tower were not arranged in order, but one little girl, who was doing it, put smaller cubes below bigger ones.

At the first table there was a little girl who had worked at a buttoning frame and had arranged colour tablets. She now got one of the stands with solid insets, and got one, too, for a much younger child who sat beside her. But they yielded to temptation, and pretended to play the piano on the stand until the directrice came up.

Meanwhile the peevish child was in hot water again, and was crying and rolling on the rug and pulling up his clothes in an unpleasant way. He left the tower and went to the frames, but two children who were having a dispute over the long stair came rolling over the frames. These two, however, recovered themselves and returned to the long stair, but only to pretend to play the piano with the pieces.

Some of the children were nevertheless working well and steadily. The pink boy, whom I had observed on my previous visit, was sitting at a table with a boy in red, and both were working quietly with the plane insets. They attracted, possibly by their good behaviour, the attention of the peevish child, who went and sat down by the red boy, until the red boy drove him off. The peevish boy began to cry and went off, but he had also interfered with the pink boy, and the pink boy, as I had seen on my previous visit, was not afraid to fight. The pink boy followed the peevish child, who turned to fight, but he was put *hors de combat* by a good knock which the pink boy

gave him in a very calm and determined manner, which seemed to say that he would teach him not to interfere with other people. The peevish child was again in tears. The way of transgressors was not pleasant.

The boy in red put away the plane insets and took out the sand-paper letters and began to trace some of them. This he knew how to do very well, and when another little child came up beside him, he showed this child how to trace the letters. The pink boy had also put away the plane insets and taken out some of the sand-paper letters, but he was going round his letter with his finger the wrong way, and this escaped the vigilance of the directrice. A little girl was also working at the letters.

One boy brought out a drawing and wanted to go on colouring it, but he was told to put it away. Apparently the colouring only came at the end of the morning.

Meanwhile the peevish child was again active. He and two others opened the piano, and the directrice and the English student both had to come to the rescue. The children had next a quarrel over the directrice's chair and one was soon crying. Then the peevish child tried to climb on to a table and had to be sent off, and more children had to be kept away from the piano.

It was now after eleven, and even the pink boy gave up being industrious and yielded to the tempta-

tion of sliding on a table. A little girl was crying. The child next to her was trying to comfort her. The directrice came up and took the crying child to a far table and gave her the solid insets.

The peevish child, as the directrice came back, was just giving a sounding smack to another child, who naturally cried. Thereupon the directrice scolded the peevish child and sent him off. He pretended to cry, and when he had seated himself on the floor, he tried hard to produce tears. At a quarter past eleven, precisely the same time at which she had started it on my first visit, the directrice began the silence game. The peevish child and two other children did not take part. It can be imagined from my description of what had been going on previously that it was not well done, and to make it more difficult some Italian visitors came in after it had begun and made a noise. Four of the boys did not cover their faces when the other children did, and two of the children talked while the names were being called. One boy began to sing and play with something on the table. The pink boy when called fell down and then began to fight. The directrice stood, as she had on the previous occasion, in front of the blackboard at the end of the room. This time I was not sitting so close to her, and could see the children and was able to observe how, when they gathered round her after their names were called, they wet their fingers

in their mouths and began making marks on the blackboard. I had been told of this by English visitors who had been previously in the school. For some time this passed, as it must usually have passed, unobserved, but on this occasion the directrice saw a little girl doing it and stopped her. It would have been better, of course, to cease calling the children. In the other Case it was much more usual to call some only of the children. The directrice could then have spoken to the children at once about the dirtiness of what they were doing. Instead, she went on until all the children, those who had behaved themselves and those who had not, were called, and the children round her went on amusing themselves with their wet fingers on the blackboard. I think that the more experienced teachers, such as those in Milan, were right in not making the silence game a regularly recurring event, and no directrice ought to think that it is necessary to call all the children. Rather should those who cover their faces best and who sit most still be called and the others left.

At half-past eleven the English student went to the piano, but before she was ready some of the children had begun to strum, and the directrice had to come and send them off. She was not the student who had played on the previous occasion, and her music was not so suitable. As they marched one little child fell down and cried, but this of course might have

happened anywhere. Then they sang. Their voices were certainly softer and better trained than those of the San Lorenzo children, but they were children of a better class, though one would not have known it from their behaviour, and they had the advantage of having a piano. They did not know the songs so well, but then in the older schools the younger children picked up the words from the elder children who knew them. Only about five children knew the second song. More, however, sang when the directrice herself sang.

The music lasted until a quarter to twelve. Then the Italian visitors took their leave, saying a good deal to the directrice.

Although little time was left for the colouring, yet the children showed a desire to begin, and some of them got out the crayons and insets and the directrice gave round the paper. They reseated themselves. All, however, was not peace. Five children chased one boy and smacked him. The English student went to the rescue. A good many children, however, did the colouring attentively; three raced round the room, and before long the peevish child became again a disturber. He came up to the table at which a little girl was seated, one of the beautiful white tables, spat upon it and rubbed it with a metal inset, making dirty marks on the white enamel. He next went up to two other children who were working and tried

to disturb them. He made no attempt to work himself. Another of the boys began to shout.

The number of children at work had become less. The little boy who seemed to have charge of the cupboard where the frames were kept was getting them all out in a pile on the floor, preparatory to putting them back in order in the cupboard, just as he did on my last visit.

But the peevish child was still active. He took a sheet of paper and crushed it up, then he scribbled with red chalk on the white table, and then he rubbed his ball of paper over the drawing of another child.

Now one thing that characterized the tenement Case dei Bambini in Milan and Rome was the punctuality with which the children left at twelve and five o'clock, the friendly handshake that preceded their departure, and the happy, unwearied faces with which they went. Here this punctuality of departure was lacking. At ten minutes past twelve some of the children were still working at their drawings, and at a quarter past twelve three were left in the room with the English student and myself. She collected the metal insets, which should of course have been put away by the children. Even at twenty past twelve there were two children left.

I set off thoughtfully towards my hotel. The room in which the children had worked, with its marble floor and dainty walls and furniture, was more

beautiful than any I had seen. Yet the children had not been beautiful.

Of one thing I felt certain, and that was that had Dr. Montessori seen the peevish child as I saw him that morning she would have thought it time for her special treatment of isolation. Indeed, from what I have heard from other visitors, this treatment might well have come some weeks earlier. Probably a rest cure was what the child needed.

I relate only what I saw. Strange as it may sound, I think the disorder that had disfigured the morning's work came rather from lack of freedom than from excess. The directrice from the first had had to think as much of the students as of the children. Consequently she had mechanically followed the procedure as to the division of the time that was customary at the Via Giusti instead of making her own division to suit her conditions. Whereas at the Via Giusti the children had a garden with shade-giving trees to stay in till ten o'clock, these little children had nothing but the strip of exposed waste ground which before ten o'clock in the fierce Roman sun became exhaustingly hot. After becoming tired outside, the work for more than an hour with the material was too much. Could the children have brought lunch with them and have eaten it in quiet rest before eleven o'clock, the morning might have gone more happily. Of course on the experience of two visits I cannot

infer that they always had the silence game at a quarter past eleven. I can only say that on my last visit they had it when it would have been better omitted. The crowding of the colouring work, which the children evidently liked, into the last quarter of an hour seemed again an unnecessary curtailment of their freedom. In the Via Giusti the children had the whole afternoon for their drawing and games, and in the morning they had the meal which was an enjoyment to them.

In the Via Trionfale practically a new type of school had been started, one with a three-hours day and no facilities for working in touch with the parents. I do not think that the best plan of working it had been hit on. Probably there had been too much observation of the children and not enough love. Something that had been present in the little San Lorenzo school in the Via Marsi had not yet entered here.

CHAPTER XI

S. ANGELO DI PESCHERIA

I HAD not taken Mr. Holmes's pamphlet with me to Italy. Had I done so, I should have realized who Signorina Galli-Saccenti was when she was mentioned to me in Milan by an Italian graduate who had formerly acted as directrice in the Via Solari, and was at that

time working in the office of the Humanitarian Society. As it was, it was some time before I discovered where her school in Rome was. I saw her name in the visitors' book at the Via Marsi, together with that of Mr. Holmes, and found on inquiry that she was the English-speaking teacher who had accompanied him on his observation visits and helped him to overcome the language difficulty. I learnt that hers was a municipal school, and after several visits to the Municipio I obtained a letter of admission. The visiting day at S. Angelo di Pescheria school was on Fridays, from ten to twelve. It was on Friday, May 23, that I paid my first visit to this school.

The neighbourhood in which the school is situated lies to the north of the Piazza Venezia and is a very poor one. Some of the adjacent streets are most undesirable, and when I went to find where the school was prior to May 23, I wandered into side streets out of which I was glad to get safely. However, when one did know the way there was no difficulty.

The school-building is an old one. I did not see all over it. I went to see the special classes which had been taught by means of the Montessori material. One can of course be taken over the school without seeing these two classes. This happens to some visitors.

These two special classes consist of children who entered the school at the age of six, more than two years ago, and now are in the third grade, and those

who entered at the same age, more than a year ago, and are now in the second grade. The third grade class is the one which Mr. Holmes saw in its first year in 1911. The directrice explained to me that this year she had no first grade class using Montessori material. Had she had one, no doubt the visitors would have poured into it as they did into the Via Giusti. Consequently she considered it wiser just to let her new children that year work with Froebelian material, not of course because she preferred this, but in order to prevent any appearance of competing with the other show schools.

On May 23 I arrived at ten o'clock and was at once taken to the second grade class, and was introduced to the teacher and given a chair near her table in front of the children. The children had tables and small chairs, and there were four rows of six tables. Each table had an inkwell, and there was a slate tied to a leg of the table. The room was about the size of the classroom most commonly seen in English secondary schools.

On the walls there were two large blackboards, one of these was squared for sums. There was also a street-map of Rome. There were cupboards, some of them with small drawers. The windows had brown holland blinds which let down, there were plants on the window-sills, among these a little rose-tree in flower.

It did not take long to discover how much freedom the children had. They moved about the room when they wanted to, and they did this in a quiet and orderly way. They talked when they wanted to. They went out of the room without asking, and they drew up the blind when they wanted to. I saw them go without asking to the teacher's drawer and take out a new pen-nib. They went up to her desk with the compositions they had written and stood there reading them over before they put them in the drawer. The teacher meanwhile was not at her table, but was seated beside one of the little girls at the child's table, giving her an individual lesson in composition.

Several of the children were engaged in writing compositions. There was a box in one of the cupboards which contained pictures sewn on to cards and protected by neat brown paper covers bearing an appropriate title. The little girls went to this box and chose for themselves one of these pictures. Their composition was a description of the picture. I saw a good many of the pictures. There was great variety. Some of them were pictures of flowers, others were of groups of children variously engaged. The little girls seemed greatly interested in writing about the subjects which they chose in this way. They did not always write on different subjects, however, sometimes all on the same.

A pile of corrected compositions was on the teacher's table, and these I read and with very great interest, for they gave an account of the celebration which had taken place on the birthday of the directrice, which had fallen that week. The day had been a holiday, although the girls had come to school, but all the girls by acting and drilling had done something to celebrate the event. The new-comers forming the first grade class had drilled themselves. The inspector, too, had been present. Most of the children had written four pages of description, and had dwelt on the points which had particularly interested them. For children of seven and eight years of age they were undoubtedly excellent compositions, and they gave me in an accidental way an insight into the spirit of the school, which I could not have obtained so well in any other way.

There was another box in the cupboard containing arithmetic questions. I saw a little girl take out one of these, then apparently finding it too difficult, she exchanged it for an easier one. There were two little girls doing sums on the squared blackboard, and when the teacher had finished with the little girl whose composition she had been going over, she came to them to see what they were doing.

The children could, if they liked, put two tables together to join for reading. Several pairs joined up in this way, and each pair sat reading quietly from one

book. I saw a child go to the cupboard, take out soap and a towel, and go out of the room. After a short time she returned and put them back in the cupboard.

It was about eleven that some of the children got out their drawing-books and crayon pencils. They used the Montessori metal insets for making the outlines, and several of them began to draw. My attention was attracted to a little girl near the far window, who looked, so it seemed to me, very cross, by noticing two little girls get down a looking-glass and show her her face in the glass. I should have liked to inquire more into the meaning of this proceeding.

At twenty minutes past eleven most of the girls got out lunch baskets or bags, which contained food brought from home, and ate what they had brought, sitting at their tables. When they had finished, they put paper and any bits into the waste-paper basket, wiped their tables, and several of them went out to wash. They then spread napkins out on the tables before they got out their needlework. This needlework consisted of either red and blue threadwork on linen or woolwork canvas worked in coloured threads, though one little girl was knitting. A group of children was gathered for some time round the teacher at her table consulting her as to their sewing.

Some of the girls preferred drawing. I saw two children trying to draw a terra-cotta vase. One made it blue, one yellow. One child drew a flower like a poppy with the help of the oval metal frames. It was of course a conventionalized flower. One child tried to draw her hand from nature. I do not remember whether she traced it round, as had the child at the Via Marsi, but here the teacher thought it worth while to examine the drawing, and then taking the child's hand to point out where her representation was not correct. The little girl went back to her seat and improved her drawing.

I looked through several of the books of drawings. Interspersed with drawings outlined from the metal frames there were free drawings. All the drawings were clearly dated in ink. Probably these children could have done more drawing from nature had more stimulus in that direction been given.

The help which the children rendered one another was plainly evident. One little girl who did not find the working on canvas easy was being taught by her neighbour.

I was much interested in seeing the teacher give back a composition which had apparently not been well done, for about half a page was crossed through in blue crayon. The child was sitting in the front row. She folded her arms and was evidently much put out. She would not begin to look for her mistakes.

The teacher took no notice of her, but several of the other children gathered round her, read the passages crossed out, found mistakes, and encouraged her to re-write. At last she unfolded her arms and took her pen in hand. One of the children remained at her side until the work was started and some of it had been approved by the teacher. Then the little girl's attitude entirely changed. She gave herself up to the task and went on writing without help. But before she took what she had written to the teacher, she first showed it to the little girl who had helped her.

It seemed to me that I had watched moral conduct in the making and it was all so simple, so natural, and so beautiful. The one child had been aided in self-conquest, and the other five children had learnt to help a comrade whose good will had for a moment threatened to give way. The teacher had hardly been drawn into it; she was but the higher authority which decided on the correctness of grammatical constructions, and not having taken part in the conflict for good and evil which had gone on in the child's will, she could smile her approval when the exercise had been correctly re-written just as serenely as if no struggle had taken place. She was an impersonal judge, not a taskmaster to be placated.

There was a time in the annals of education in this country when needle drill was a regular thing

in elementary schools for young children. To-day such a thing is derided. I thought of this as I watched one of these little Italian girls deliberately practising threading her needle.

At twelve o'clock the girls left the classroom with their teacher.

I spoke in high praise of all I had seen to the directrice. Consequently she invited me to come again to see the third grade class, which also employed the method of liberty, on the Monday, as I had to leave Rome before the next visitors' day, on the following Friday.

Accordingly on the Monday I arrived at ten minutes to ten, just in time to see the girls that I was to watch busy washing themselves in the lavatory. Their classroom was a similar one to the second grade room, and furnished with tables and chairs. There were thirty tables, but they were not all of the same height. Two of the girls were noticeably taller and older than the others. They had not been in this class from the time of their entrance into the school, but had been in other classes where they had been very unhappy and in constant conflict with their mistresses. This was the first class in which they had been happy. Their presence in the class spoilt its harmony, and prevented the total impression from being as pleasing as had been that made by the second grade class. But when one heard from the directrice

how much happier these two girls had been in this class, one approved her wisdom.

This she told me at the end of the morning, but it had not taken me long to discover that both these girls were very backward if not defective.

The walls were decorated with two street-maps of Rome and with two historical pictures. There was a large blackboard on the side of the room in which was the door. At the other end of the room were the cupboards. On the window-sill there was a jar containing a bunch of wild flowers. The teacher had a desk, near which I sat, between the door and the blackboard, but she did not remain at it. She sat in the body of the room and the girls grouped themselves round her. She had only a small group at first, and I could see that one of these was getting most of her attention.

They were variously occupied apparently in ways chosen by themselves. One of the two older girls, whom I at once noticed to have a very dull expression, was sewing. All the girls wore pinafores and had their names worked across the front. The initials of this dull dark girl were M. E. She continued sewing for twenty minutes but not in peace all the time, for the second of the older girls, who was thirteen years of age, and whose initials were B. P., came up and interrupted her. B. P. was a bigger and more developed girl than M. E. She had a certain amount of prettiness,

and wore a very ornamental comb in her hair, such as a grown-up person would wear, and ear-rings. She formed a contrast both in appearance and ways to the children who had belonged to the class from the first and whose ages would be nine or ten.

These girls were all busily occupied: two of them were doing arithmetic on the blackboard, one was measuring the pictures, cupboards, and tables with a tape measure and putting down her measurements. In front of the cupboards was a space clear of tables, and here there sat two groups, one of four girls, one of three, all working arithmetic on their slates. Two more girls were doing arithmetic in the front row, and one of them was teaching the other. Another girl had out some of the sand-paper letters and was writing on her slate. The directrice told me that they used these letters to improve their writing—that is, I expect, to prevent its deteriorating. A second child used them later.

B. P. was at first using the geometrical insets, she drew some of them on her slate, but soon put them away. She wandered up to the blackboard, but the two children doing arithmetic there managed to send her off. It was then that she went to M. E., the girl sewing, and worried her. Then she returned to her slate and for a few minutes stood up writing. She soon gave that up and walked about, knocking against one of the tables. She was clumsy in her movements.

She next marked some of the tables with red chalk. Then she got a pen and dipped it in the ink, but did nothing with it. She next looked at a picture in the corner of the room. She left that, however, to come to interfere with the girl at the blackboard. She got some chalk and wrote some figures on the blackboard. The second girl, who had been working at the blackboard, showed her some figures and tried to interest her in them, but she soon went off, to the cupboard this time. She looked at the things in the cupboard for quite a long period, and at one time took out a cone and marked it with chalk.

Meanwhile M. E. after working at her sewing for twenty minutes put it away and went out of the room. She was away ten minutes. When she came back she went to the blackboard. One of the two girls who had been working there was still working steadily, and with this child M. E. interfered. However, the teacher saw her and sent her away. After a good deal of hunting about, she settled down to measure some white tape with a black strip which she got out of an envelope. Then she straightened out and wound up the tape. She seemed to have rather a liking for arranging things, and she next arranged her books. This done, she went to the blackboard, and as the little girl who had been working there left it, she had it to herself. She began to do division money sums. When B. P., who had all this time been

playing with things in the cupboard, saw M. E. at the board, she came there, too, and rubbed out some of M. E.'s sums. M. E. managed to keep her from doing that, but B. P. continued to stand there chalking the side of the blackboard. The teacher saw her and spoke to her, and after this she went out of the room several times in succession. M. E.'s arithmetic on the board did not amount to much. She wrote some figures, and made a very crude drawing of what seemed to be meant for an archway. Then she, too, went out of the room.

The normal girls had meanwhile continued busy. Two of them worked together at the sand-paper letters, tracing them and writing them on their slates. I should have been interested in hearing their own account of what they were doing and of why they thought it necessary. But this was not possible.

The teacher now sat at the side of the room and a big group of all the girls brought up their chairs round her. Each girl had a reading-book. One girl read aloud, and then followed a good deal of conversation with the teacher. Each girl, in fact, reproduced the paragraph she had read in her own words, and then there was general conversation on the meaning and on points of grammar. Their voices sounded low and pleasant, and it was a very informal kind of lesson. Reading aloud was learnt in this class. Grade two had only, I think, done silent reading.

When B. P. returned she had no book, and sat on a table playing with a slate; later she crunched up chalk. M. E. was eating, and when she had finished went over with her paper to the waste-paper basket. She was quieter than B. P., but the teacher took no notice of either of them.

B. P. then tilted the table on which she was sitting, next she took a box which belonged to a girl near her. Becoming restless for a while she moved about carrying a slate, but returned and broke in from time to time with remarks which were taken no notice of. Yet she seemed able to repeat some of the story, although apparently her attention was never concentrated. I could quite understand that in a class in which she was expected to conform with what normal children could do, she would be a source of constant interruption and of annoyance to teacher and the other pupils. The directrice said that both B. P. and M. E. could write fairly well and do simple sums, but they did no writing that morning.

The reading lesson ended at twenty minutes past eleven. Several of the girls went out at once after a piece had been set to be read at home. The others stayed and put away their books in their satchels, and set the chairs straight. The teacher had promised the girls that they should spend the rest of the morning in the playground; that consequently was all there was to be seen that morning.

As I have said, the general impression was spoilt by the presence of B. P. and M. E. The method very clearly showed the difference between the normal and abnormal children, but whether the abnormal really gained by it was a problem. However, in schools in which the stick is used, this class with the method of liberty must indeed have seemed a haven to them, and notwithstanding their restlessness and aimlessness they were very quiet and did not really interrupt the others.

CHAPTER XII

THE ASILO INFANTILE AT BELLINZONA

The Asili for children under six in Italian Switzerland have all adopted the Montessori material under the influence of their inspectress, Signorina Bontempi, whereas the many Asili in Italy have been contented with their old methods. I mentioned, for instance, the Milanese Asili in my account of the Casa dei Bambini in the Via Solari at Milan. Like the Asilo which was adjacent to the Via Solari, the Asilo in Bellinzona was in an excellent building and had a refectory and kitchen and garden. The children stayed all day, from nine till half-past four, and had their midday meal in the refectory. The Asilo was well circumstanced, therefore, for carrying out the Montessori method with

completeness, for where a meal forms part of the day's programme there is an opportunity for training which can hardly be otherwise supplied.

At the time of my visit the number in attendance was diminished by infectious complaints, and instead of finding three classes of 25, 25, and 13 respectively, I found classes of 19, 13, and 9.

This was the first of all the schools I had seen for infants, with the exception of the open-air school in Verona, in which the Montessori material was used where there had been a division into classes. The number in attendance was not greater than that in the Viale Lombardia in Milan, and there was no necessity to divide up the children, for they had the very large hall into which the classrooms opened, which had free access to the garden. However, the division was made, and there were three classes, taught respectively by the directrice and two assistants, both trained teachers.

In the top class there were children of five and six years old, and this was the smallest of the three classes; in the next there were five-year-olds mixed with some four-year-olds; while the bottom class consisted of four-year-olds and three-year-olds.

Signorina Bontempi, with whom I conversed about this division, approved of it. But I thought that it had distinct disadvantages. It separated children of one family, and it prevented any one person from

having that real knowledge of the children which was needed for co-operation with the parents. There were many aspects of the work which could have been developed if the three teachers had not been tied to their separate rooms by this division.

In this Asilo I was repeatedly moved by the directrice from one classroom to another. I saw all classes at work, but I did not obtain a clear idea of how any one class was occupied during the day. The directrice had been a Froebelian teacher, and although she had dropped the Froebelian material with the constant giving of directions and stream of talk from the teacher which its use implies when carried out in strict adherence to the plan devised by Froebel in his later years, yet she had not, I think, abandoned her reliance on two of the aids towards the maintenance of order to which Froebel attached importance. These were the singing of songs over their work and getting the children into line with or without song. The way in which the children began to sing, seated in their chairs, at the lead of the teacher, in this Asilo reminded me strongly of what I had seen in the Froebelian Asili in Milan. There was something unnatural about it. In the management of the midday meal there was reliance on the effect of getting into line for the maintenance of order before the children went into the refectory. The children were disciplined instead of being self-

disciplined. My first visit was paid to the four- and five-year-olds. They had already taken out the material and were seated at tables for one. These tables, which could be folded up, were painted white, and the cabinets for the children's books were also painted white. The room was a good size, and opened into a big hall from which there was free access to a pebbled playground with trees. In this second class they were using the three solid insets, the broad stair, the tower and frames, and two children were using Froebelian bricks for building. The teacher went round the class and was questioning them individually. Suddenly they began to sing, sitting at their places. The teacher led them. This may have been a sign to the directrice to fetch me into another class.

I next went into the directrice's own class, in which there were nine children. Three were using sand-paper letters, one had strips of rough and smooth, one rods for counting, one plane insets, one the blue and pink letters, one a picture-book, and the ninth was drawing on the blackboard. They afterwards got out the stuffs. The directrice moved round the class questioning them individually. Presently they began to sing, seated on their chairs.

In the class with the youngest children they were mostly occupied with the frames and with the plane insets. They had their single tables, either separately

or arranged in groups. The children put away the things they had finished with in an orderly way and fetched out fresh material quite freely. But they, too, sang while seated in the midst of their work.

All the children went out to play in the playground at 10.30, and when the little ones came in they did the silence game. But I was not allowed to stay in their classroom. My time before the midday meal was divided between the top and second classes.

In the top class they began by singing, and one little boy beat time with a drum.

Then the directrice gave two cards with numbers to each child in the class, and when she called out the number which any child had, that child came up and presented the card to me. This ensured, of course, that they could recognize the numbers.

There was one little girl who went to the blackboard at the back of the room and wrote numbers on it. The directrice also gave all the number cards to one little boy, who possibly did not know them as well as the others, and he gave them to her, saying their names one by one, while the other children watched.

Then she put them through some singing exercises and finger exercises, and before I was taken to the second class they got into two lines, boys in one and girls in another, and marched about the room, sometimes stamping, sometimes on tiptoe. There was no piano.

In the second class several of the children had bricks for building. One child had Froebel's rods and made a paling. A little girl had the tower. The teacher showed picture-books to a group of five, but all the rest occupied themselves, and material they had finished with they put away.

At twenty minutes to twelve they all went into the big hall, and had to wait there for twenty minutes. In order to keep them good, the teachers kept them marching about and singing. There was no attempt at games, and mixed up for this *mauvais quart d'heure* it was no wonder that several children smacked one another and cried. They made a great deal of noise.

At twelve they marched into the refectory with their bibs on. There were benches and long wooden tables with circular holes for the aluminium soup basins which the kitchenmaid filled. These wooden tables, with circular holes, were exactly like those which I had seen in the asili at Milan. The meal was about as great a contrast to the quiet and orderly meal in the Via Giusti as one could well imagine, though, like it, it consisted of soup followed by food which they brought in packets and baskets from home. There was not the slightest attempt to throw any of the responsibility for the conduct of the meal on the children. The teachers, who had hurriedly partaken of soup in another room, had to distribute the children's

packets, and the children threw paper and orange-peel on the floor. Many of the children sprawled on the tables, and many put their feet up through the circular holes. It showed me very clearly that although the Montessori material had been used, the spirit of Dr. Montessori's ideal had been wanting. I saw no evidence of self-control or of consideration for others during this meal.

After this repast the children rested, for the mid-day heat was great. I returned at three o'clock and found that there was shade under the trees in the garden, and that the children were playing there nicely. Although this garden extended round the house on either side of the pebbly patch, the children did not seem to have garden plots of their own to work in.

About half-past three they went into the classrooms. One of these, at least, was quite cool. The children in the top class wrote in books or coloured some outlines done with the metal insets, one an outlined poppy. One child was drawing a house on the blackboard, one was building with bricks. At the request of the directrice two little girls showed me a dance which they had learnt. But as there was no piano, they had to dance without music, and they were not graceful in their movements. It lacked the spontaneity which made the dancing, for example, in the Fua Fusinata so charming.

I then went into the second class. Here they had

bells like those I had seen in the Via Giusti, and two children said which bell was similar in note to the one first sounded. The other children sat and watched. Then three children in succession did the solid insets blindfolded, and again the other children watched. There was no attempt on the part of these other children to occupy themselves, and at intervals the teacher started songs. Later on they said a prayer, and after that there ensued a period of waiting, during which the children sat still until a mother or sister came to accompany them home. One of the great advantages of the Casa dei Bambini in the courtyard of the tenement buildings was that even the smallest children could go home alone.

Owing to the division of the children according to age, there was here little of that interesting imitation of and interest in the elder children by the little ones which I had found so attractive in the Via Marsi, and which seemed to me to be a considerable factor in securing the progress of the children. Nor had the elder children the opportunity of feeling a pride in what the little ones could do, or of entering into the same relations with them as they had where they worked side by side.

Although the children were clean children, yet their cleanliness was not so patent as had been the love of cleanliness in the children in Milan. I saw some of the writing of four- and five-year old children. It

struck me as much shakier than that of children of the same age in Rome. Of course I had not much opportunity of judging, but I saw no signs in my day there of that intense liking for writing on the blackboard which had characterized so many of the children in the schools in Rome. I saw a teacher give an arithmetic lesson with the long stair, but when she got up from the rug on which the little boy was working, he put the long stair away.

Altogether it was a school which, as far as material conditions went, had everything that could be desired, but although the Montessori material was used, yet the spirit of the school was not truly Montessorian. This came chiefly, I think, from a certain vacillation and want of clearness of conception on the part of the directrice.

In the same little town of Bellinzona was another Casa dei Bambini in the Istituto Maria, a convent school situated not far from the Asilo. I visited this with an introduction from Signorina Bontempi, but the infectious complaints rife in the town had led to the temporary closing of the Casa, and I only found there three little boarders. Of these three, one had just arrived. However, I saw the room in which the work was done and the material they used. This was just the ordinary Montessori material, but looking at it made it easier to talk with the sister who acted as directrice of the Casa. We talked for over an hour.

The room devoted to the Casa was none other than the big gymnasium, which opened directly on the garden on its one side. The convent had a beautiful garden, and the part adjoining the gymnasium sloped away from it, so that children playing there could easily be kept in view from the room. Along one side of the room were bars for climbing on, such as are used in so many schools, and one of the three children present, the little girl, climbed almost to the top. The sister did not show the least anxiety lest she should fall. Yet she was under six years of age.

There was a grand piano in a corner, and for the time being the children's tables were folded up and set on it. These tables were for one child, like those in the Bellinzona Asilo, only they were not painted white. The little chairs were very light.

The work in this Casa had been going on for two years. The number of children in attendance was between thirty and forty, and the sister managed them alone. She thought it no disadvantage to have children of three, four, five, and six, all working together, and she was able without difficulty to conduct the Casa single-handed. The little ones could go into the garden when they wanted to, and she could see them from the French window.

The children were free to take what material they wanted out of the big cupboard against the end wall, and they put it back when they had finished with

it. They had ten fastening frames in all, but only one tower, one long stair, and one broad stair.

The hours were from 8.30 till 12, and from 1.30 till 4. The children went home to their midday meal, and did not have a meal at school, except those who brought food from home, who could eat it at ten o'clock, if they wished.

The sister showed me some of their drawings. These were done in books and not on loose paper, and the children of course began with outlines made with the metal frames. But the sisters in this convent were very artistic. In the waiting-room of the convent I had seen some really beautiful, large paintings of flowers, and the directrice of the Casa was no mean artist. For the elder children she made outlines of flowers, which showed accuracy of observation as well as artistic talent. She evidently spent a good deal of time and took much pains in making these. Through the colouring work with the crayon pencils the children therefore were learning to observe and know the flowers which grew not only in the garden, but wild in the fields and on the road-sides.

They also did plasticine work, and the sister brought out a drawer in which she kept some of their work. I was particularly interested in plasticine tops which would really spin.

There was only one blackboard, which was, of course, a disadvantage. For writing the children

used slates with chalk, and the directrice found that the elder children liked writing and reading. She never gave them dictation, they did free composition.

For number-work they found the numbers from calendars very useful.

In addition to the Montessori material the children had dolls, with which the little girls were fond of playing, and Froebel's bricks for building.

She was a very human sister and loved her work and the children. I regretted greatly that I was not able to see the bambini at work.

CHAPTER XIII

ASILO GIUSEPPE GALLI

I NOW come to the only other visit for which I had time, my visit to the Asilo Giuseppe Galli, in the little village of Gerra-Gambierogna, on Lake Maggiore. It was, I thought, one of the most beautiful little villages that I had ever seen, especially in June, when the roses were in glorious bloom.

The Asilo was a white house near the church, and from the windows of the working-room across the Asilo garden there was a lovely view of the lake. I had a mile to walk from Gerra station. I arrived unexpected, for I carried with me the letter of introduction from Signorina Bontempi. The inspectress had warned me that the furniture was old-fashioned-

they still had benches—but she had told me that I should find there something I should like. She was not mistaken.

The ground floor of the Asilo, which was two-storied, was devoted to the children. There was the working-room, a playroom, a refectory, a kitchen, and a lavatory. On the first floor were the rooms which the directrice occupied with her mother and sister. Having her mother and sister in the house with her, ready to help on occasion, and interested in the well-being of the children, made the directrice's life very different from what it would have been without them. She had been there five years. The school hours were from eight in the morning until six in the evening, six days a week, so that the mothers of the children who worked in the fields had a long day for their work, free from anxiety about the children. In December and January the children did not come. Their ages were three, four, five, and six, but there was one little boy of two and a half who had been very ill and was still ailing and fretful. One of his sisters, a girl of eleven, who should have been in the communal school, came with him to give him the special attention which he needed.

The directrice was young and very good-looking. She had a very quiet manner, but was an alert observer. She was a thoroughgoing believer in the principle of liberty. The material was set out on

a table at the end of the room and the twenty-two children helped themselves, and put back on the table what they had finished with.

When I arrived they seemed mainly occupied with the colours and the solid insets. They arranged the series of shades in the colour tablets in pairs, as they did in Milan, which seems to me a better exercise than simply arranging the eight shades in series, because it involves matching as well as discrimination. An elder child was showing a younger child how to arrange them. They had no light little tables, but heavy ugly tables for three, and, as I have said before, benches. One of the elder boys was colouring outlined flowers which the directrice had drawn. There was one little girl occupied with four of the sand-paper letters, but she put them away soon after my arrival, and took from the table the geometrical insets. She was very careful in the way she took her finger round the outline. This she had been taught to do, for the impulse of the child with the insets is only to use his eyes, and to go on trying with them until he finds the right one for the hole. Then I noticed that with the triangles and polygons she was counting the sides. It was the first time that I had seen a child do this. When she had finished with one set of insets, she took out a fresh set.

The directrice had bandaged a child's eyes and was letting her put in the solid insets. A group of

children stood round watching, and when the little girl had finished one of these children undid the bandage. There were several children eager to have their eyes bandaged.

The frames were in great demand, and one boy got out the sticks for counting. Meanwhile the little girl with the plane insets had made the further discovery that some of the geometrical figures could be turned round. She turned the equilateral triangle round a great many times.

One of the elder girls had out the box of blue and pink letters, and composed the words ' Mamma ', ' babbo ', and ' fronte ', which she pronounced. Then she put the letters away in their compartments in the box.

There was a good-sized blackboard at the end of the room, part of the old furniture, for it was marked ready for the Froebelian chequers. A little girl went to this board, taking some of the metal frames with her, and outlined a geometrical figure. Then she chalked it in. The doing of this was evidently a novelty, and a little boy came up and did the same. A third child also wanted to do it, but the board was not big enough for three. The directrice consequently sent off all but the first little girl. This child, however, permitted a second child to come, and the two children were making their geometrical figures on the board for a long time.

I heard the directrice questioning some of the children who were using the geometrical insets as to the names of the triangle, square, and circle. She was very careful over their articulation. Unless the children have had their attention drawn to the letter-sounds in the words they use before they come to the sand-paper letters, they do not connect these so easily with their speech. She next used the boxes for sounds with a few of the children who stood round her at a table near the window.

Meanwhile one of the little girls had out a doll and walked about the room with it very quietly.

The directrice took one of the boxes of pink and blue letters and set to work to straighten it. Three children stood near helping. One only of these children knew the letters, but the other two could help, and thus learnt incidentally something about the shapes of the letters.

One of the children was playing on the floor with the tower. The directrice went to this child and did what I had not seen done elsewhere, taught the child to count the cubes. She took great pains with the child's pronunciation.

There was no restricting the colouring work to the afternoon here, and several children got out the metal frames and their drawing-books. A child who had the oval frame, I noticed, outlined the oval with the help of the frame and then used the metal oval

inset with a pencil of another colour, so that he had, as described in Dr. Montessori's book, the two ovals close together in two colours. This showed how carefully the directrice had taught the children.

On one of the tables a child had out pairs of the red, violet, blue, and yellow tablets. He paired them. A much younger child was watching him. The elder child mixed up the tablets and left them for the little child to arrange. The little one put the two reds together correctly, but the violet he put with the blue. Another child came up and corrected him.

Probably there would have been adjournment to the garden by this time had the weather been propitious. But heavy thunder-rain, unaccompanied by thunder, was pouring down. Two children were standing on the bench at the window watching the big drops fall. Other children came up. All wanted to see, and one child hit another. This did not escape the vigilant directrice. Her plan was to make the offender kiss the child hit.

One of the elder boys wrote spontaneously about six disjointed sentences, without help, in his exercise book. In the six sentences there was only one spelling mistake.

For some time the directrice showed one of the elder boys the pictures in an illustrated paper. She took no notice of the other children, they went on

occupying themselves. The doll, for instance, passed from hand to hand, and some of the girls got out the box of stuffs and went through them, naming them several times. An elder child sitting at the table near them sometimes corrected them. At a quarter to one they all went into the playroom, and they ran about and made a noise there in a manner that showed that they knew how to romp. I looked in at them having their midday meal in the refectory, and noticed with satisfaction that they had learnt how to behave at table.

By the time their meal was finished, the rain had completely passed away and the weather was beautifully fine and hot. When they went into the garden they were glad of the shade afforded by the chestnuts, under which were benches and tables. On these tables they built with the Froebelian bricks, and they knew how to use the bricks to represent a variety of things. It seemed to me entirely their own wish to go into the working-room for material, and gradually a good deal of the material was brought out. I was sitting right among them and could hear what they and the directrice said. At first when I talked to the children they were unaccustomed to my foreign accent, and only shook their heads or laughed when I spoke to them. The little girl of eleven seemed especially amused. But gradually it dawned on her and on the others that the words I was using were

Italian words and they began to try to understand. Very soon the little girl and I were really conversing, and for my benefit she sang some of the little songs and repeated some of the verses which she had learnt at school. She seemed quite proud to show what she knew, and the directrice told her that she ought to do some writing every day.

Many of the other children, finding that I was interested in the wild flowers that grew in the garden, brought me mallows and other flowers. But the directrice could not tell me their Italian names. She said that she did not know the wild plants. Yet what opportunities for nature study were there!

The directrice had an exercise with the long stair suitable for the garden, of her own devising. She did it with the biggest of the boys. She gave him in succession the various rods, first the nine-decimetre one, then the three perhaps, and each one she directed him to set up in a different part of the garden, so that it was well within view of the table where she sat. This table was one of the big heavy tables from the working-room, which the children had brought out themselves with a struggle. Then she told the boy to fetch her the four, the seven, and so on, and he promptly cast a swift glance round the rods as they rested against this wall and that, and brought the right one to her. Then he did one of the exercises which I had seen elsewhere, and described as seen at

the Via Giusti. He put three of the rods together, thus 3 and 2 and 1, and counted up 6. He placed the number card against each part.

Various other children looked on, and some took up the number cards and asked the names. One little girl learnt zero, while another learnt one. They held up their cards, and while the one said 'zero' the other said 'one'. Some of the children used the sticks for counting. Others used the geometrical insets. The solid insets were out, but two children had taken out the cylinders and were carrying the stands about as though they were dolls. It was, of course, not a proper use of the material, but the directrice let it pass. One little girl had out the box of blue and pink letters and composed words. I don't think that any one seeing these children could have said that the material did not appeal to them. There were lots of other things that they could have done in the garden had they chosen, but they knew that through the material they learnt, and they wanted to learn.

At four o'clock they fetched out the little baskets in which they had brought food from home, and sitting there in the garden they ate a picnic meal. I had some chocolate which I had brought with me for lunch, and I gave it to the children to divide. It was not much among so many, but such as it was, it gave me the opportunity of seeing that these children had learnt consideration for one another.

I had to leave them before six, their hour of departure, for my train went earlier. My last glimpse of the children seen from the road was of them still grouped as they had been for the meal with a background of blue lake. They waved their friendly adieus. The directrice walked with me to the station. Her sister stayed in the garden while she was away.

Not the least of the advantages of the method of liberty is that it leaves the teacher unspoilt. She is like a mother with the children, and only silly mothers act like children. To me the unnatural behaviour of some of the Froebelian teachers I have seen has always been unattractive. I hate to see them singing their silly little rhymes and looking foolish over gestures which the children ape, not with the natural imitativeness of childhood, but with the imitativeness of command. In the Montessori school both teachers and children are natural, and because natural, when good, also beautiful.

Our way to the station was along a field-path beside Lake Maggiore. Could anything have exceeded the beauty of that blue distance beyond the lake? But lovely as the landscape was under the June sunshine, I knew that for me the charm of it was many times enhanced by the thought of the little school beside the white church, now hidden from view, where that day I had had such a memorable experience,

and had seen for myself how beautiful the relation of teacher to pupils may be when the teacher truly understands what is meant by the freedom of the child.

EPILOGUE

THE final question is, What is English education going to gain from Dr. Montessori's work?

We shall not be satisfied with the planting down of a few expensively conducted Montessori schools.

Of course such experiments are necessary and valuable, especially if careful records of the work done and the conditions under which it is done are kept. But when these experiments have taught us the things we want to know, viz. how far English children resemble Italian children in their response to the Montessori material; how far the difficulty of the English language, which is not purely phonetic, necessitates modifications in the method of learning writing and the character of these modifications; how far the English parent, slum or otherwise, can and will co-operate with teachers impressed with a wider sense of their responsibilities, both with and without the pressure of a housing authority, what then? Then come big questions which we must face if the changes in our educational system which are necessary for the incorporation of Dr. Montessori's reforms are to be made.

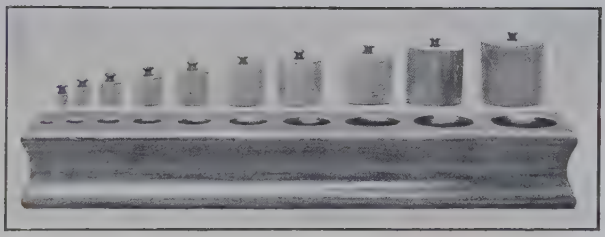
In the meantime it seems to me that we must stem the tide of public economy which is in many places closing the doors of the elementary schools to children under five. Free kindergartens may be very excellent, but why should the State make philanthropy necessary in the matter of education? We must aim at the establishment by our education authorities of small schools for young children, both connected and unconnected with blocks of dwellings. A home where no servants are kept, where the mother is responsible for all the household work, and generally for the care of a young baby as well, is a very unsuitable environment for a child of three or four. It may, of course, be superior to a school in which fifty infants are packed together in rows, breathing air that is not fresh and 'listening to teacher', but then such schools are rapidly fading out of existence.

The main thing is for educationists to be convinced and agreed as to what is the thing to aim at, and then to preach the advantages of it to the ratepayers whose children are concerned.

I am myself thoroughly convinced of the immense gain it would be to have small schools like those of the Beni Stabili and Humanitarian Societies attached to blocks of dwellings, and in them infant teachers, trained not only to teach, but as social workers, so that they might be able to secure the entire confidence of the parents, and through the children carry on that

further education of the parents for which these are at no time readier than when they are receiving God's most precious gift, a wanted child. The work of directrice in such schools would be the most valuable kind of social work which a cultured and well-educated woman with a love of children could do, and would appeal to very many who are not attracted by our infant schools as conducted at present.

The tendency at the present day by the institution of care committees, on which without doubt numbers of unsuitable people serve, who very often call out for the help of paid organizers, is to take away responsibilities from the teachers which are properly theirs. We want teachers to realize that the imparting of intellectual knowledge is only a small part of the work of education; we want them fully to comprehend what civilizing means. Hundreds and thousands of teachers do realize it. What they want is more opportunity for real comparison of experience and freedom to act.



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